**Loving Those in the Family**

**Romans 12:9-13 (ESV)**

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Today we’re going to open up our Bible’s to Romans 12:9-13. These verses come sort of like in rapid-fire, almost machine-gun like, popping at us with these 13 different commands in just a few verses, all related to love.

***9*** *Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.* ***10*** *Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.* ***11*** *Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.* ***12*** *Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.* ***13*** *Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.*

May God encourage us through His Word, this morning!

Love is the sum of the Christian faith. If we add up everything that’s involved in the life of a Christian, love would be the total. Love is the greatest virtue that adorns the life of God’s children. Love is the sweetest expression of our worship to Him. Love is the closest reflection of His character infused in us through the Gospel. Love indeed is the life blood that flows through the body of Christ, Jesus’ church. Where love is absent, worship is absent. It’s really impossible to overstate the place of love in the community of faith. The Gospel itself begins with God’s love for us. In Romans, Paul has masterfully mapped out how God loves us in Christ. And in that love, He made a way for us to be reconciled to Him so that we could know Him and enjoy Him and fellowship with Him. God explains in Romans 5:8

**Romans 5:8** but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

He died in our place. He died as an atoning sacrifice. In His death, He bore our sins in His body. The punishment that we deserve was placed upon Him. And all of that was born by love so that we could enter into a right relationship with the living God.So everyone who believes in Jesus as their Savior receives the full benefit of God’s love. Those who refuse to believe remain outside the benefits of His love.

So what response do we have as believers to being loved by God so deeply, so surely, so sacrificially? Well, the response that we give is the response of radical worship. And Paul talks about that application in Romans 12:1-2.

**Romans 12:1-2** 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.

Those two verses form the foundation for all the applications that flow from chapter 12 verse 3, on into chapter 16 of this letter. We ask the question: What does it mean for us practically, to present our bodies to God as a living sacrifice? What really does that mean? It sounds a bit mysterious, a bit shadowy. Is there any concrete way that we actually do that in Jesus’ church?

The first answer Paul gives to that question is in verses 3-8 of Romans 12. Paul says, “A life that is fully devoted to God, that yields the whole entirety of one’s body, of one’s person over to God as a living sacrifice, that person puts to use the spiritual gifts that God gives to that person, through ministry in the church.” So, one practical expression of presenting our bodies to God is saying, “God, You’ve given me spiritual gifts. I want to use them in Your church to be involved in the ministry of the church, to fulfill Your mission.” You see, we, the church, are Jesus’ body. We are His hands, His feet, His arms, His mouth, His ears, His eyes. As we present our bodies to God as living sacrifices, we bind ourselves necessarily then to ministry of the body of Jesus. This, the use of our spiritual gifts, is the will of God for us. It is His good, acceptable and perfect will. So that’s answer number one.

Are there any other ways that we apply this presentation of our bodies over to God that are concrete, that are real? “Yes,” Paul says. And he gives the second answer that is found in the verses we’ve just read, verses 9-13. God says, “A life fully devoted to God intentionally and zealously pursues love with brothers and sisters in the local church family.” That’s what it means. After urging us to use our spiritual gifts, Paul teaches us that the use of our spiritual gifts in Christian ministry means nothing if we do not love one another as we serve God together. In this way, Romans 12 matches 1 Corinthians 12 and 13. That passage also teaches about the use of spiritual gifts, every member being involved in the ministry of the church. But then in chapter 13, after explaining the use of spiritual gifts, Paul breaks out into this great poem about love within the church. And in this way, Paul is connecting Christian ministry, Christian activity, with Christian relationships in the church, and how it’s impossible for us to do anything fruitful for God’s kingdom if our relationships with one another are not right. This is what Paul says.

**1 Corinthians 13:1-3** If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

If I am martyred, but I don’t have love for brothers and sisters in my own church, then I gain nothing. When we present our bodies to God as living sacrifices, we are committing ourselves to healthy, loving relationships within the community of the local church. That’s what presenting our bodies to God means. Love within the family is an essential ingredient to every act of God-pleasing worship. Love for God always translates to a love for our brothers and sisters in our own local church and beyond. So the central idea that we want to track through these few verses here, 9-13, is this: A life devoted to God leads to a life devoted to building genuine love in the community of our own local church. Here’s how John would write it in his first epistle. He says

**1 John 4:19-21** We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

All who are born of God will love their brother because that’s what the life of God does in the soul of a man. So there are two practical questions I want to ask at the outset as we consider what this love means for us, practically.

1. Am I devoted to God?

That’s the first question we have to ask as we approach our study of Romans 12:9-13. Am I wholly devoted to God? And if the answer honestly that you give before yourself is “no,” what I would encourage you to do is consider the mercies of God in Jesus. I wouldn’t have you consider a list of things for you to do, righteous acts to accomplish in order to make that right. I don’t encourage you to try harder. No. The only way any of us is devoted to God is because God has done a miracle in our soul through rebirth. And that’s what we need. And only Jesus can bring that about. So look to Jesus. Believe in Him. God is willing and able to lead us out of spiritual darkness, out of spiritual death, into spiritual life, into a real relationship with the living God. And Jesus is the Savior. He’s the source of life. He is the Redeemer. And so the Gospel would call us to look to Jesus and live. Only through Christ will we want our lives to be lived unto God’s glory. Now if you think of that question, “Am I wholly devoted to God?” and you answer, “yes,” then question 2 applies.

2. Are you devoted to building love in our church family by pursuing love personally for your brothers and sisters here in your church family?

Are you devoted to building love by personally pursuing love within your own church family? Now if the answer to that question honestly is “No. I come. I like what’s going on. But I really don’t want to invest my life in pursuing love here in my own local church family.” If the answer to that question is no, then go back to question number one. That’s where you have to begin. Because God says if you answer “yes, I am devoted to God,” you will answer yes to the second question. So if you answer no, again, the answer is not “Well try harder to love.” You need to go back. Why is that? What’s happening inside my life that is deficient? We cannot be our own saviors. We need *the* Savior to rescue us from our selfishness. Now if however, you answer that question, yes, then we rejoice to listen to what God teaches us about this love that He calls us to pursue inside this church family.

First, there is a command. And I believe that first command is the command that sort of defines the rest. The rest really explains what this first commandment means here in verse 9. And that command is pretty simple. It says

***9*** *Let love be genuine.*

Two words stand out in that 4 word sentence; the word “love” and the word “genuine.” The word “love” here is *agape.* Paul has used this word previously in this very letter, primarily to describe God’s infinite, covenantal love for us.

**Romans 5:8** but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

God demonstrates this *agape*. It’s sacrificial. It’s giving. It’s initiating. And God then pours out this love into our lives by His Spirit so that we would be then a channel of that *agape* to flow to other brothers and sisters in this body of Christ, in this family.

Now someone may ask the question: Why do you say that these verses address love in the church community and not outside of it? We have some clues to this as we look carefully at the wording of verses 9-13. So for instance, in verse 10, the words “one another” are used two times. And again, that little phrase “one another” is used in verse 16. Now this “one another” language is used for relationships that are inside the church, not outside of it. Also, in verse 10 it talks about “brotherly” affection. Finally, in verse 13 it says, “Contribute to the needs of the saints.” God is interested in genuine love filling His family. And as members of this family, it’s right for us to be concerned about everything that God is concerned about. We’re right to say together, “By the mercies of God, I will do everything in my power to build love in my own local church family. I will pray for that. I will think about that goal and I will work toward that end.”

The second word of note here in verse 9 is the word “genuine.” God wants our love to be real. He wants it to be authentic. Evidently, the counterfeit, phony kind of love is a very present danger to the church. Paul warns about it here. Peter is going to warn about it also. He’s going to use the same word.

**1 Peter 1:22** Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart,

Peter is also concerned about a kind of love that is fake; a kind of love that is not authentic. Let me ask you a question. Have you ever had someone tell you that they loved you and then acted toward you contrary to the Gospel in such a way that you were hurt? Perhaps they gossiped about you, or they slandered you, or they rejected you, or they abandoned you. Indeed, counterfeit love will afflict every church. God warns us. He says, “Watch out for this! Don’t let it rest upon your own heart. Beware of a kind of love inside the church that is artificial.” So we’re right to be on our guard against counterfeit loves in our hearts toward one another. None of us are immune from this danger of a love that’s artificial, a love that’s not genuine. We’d love to think that we’re immune from it, but the reality is that all of us have a self-centeredness that begins to take over if we’re not arming ourselves with the Gospel every day.

God’s love, for instance, in being genuine, doesn’t smile on the outside while it’s kind of cringing on the inside. God’s love doesn’t extend an invitation to coffee or to a meal and hope that they don’t take me up on this. God’s love doesn’t make promises of commitment and then neglects those promises just sort of in passing. God’s love doesn’t offer a handshake and then turn from the person and say, “I hope I don’t have to spend much time with that individual.” You see, all those things are counterfeit forms of love. And many, many other kinds of counterfeits exist, many other expressions.

The Greek word for “genuine” is *“anupocritos.”* We get the word “hypocrite” from that word. He says, “Let love be without hypocrisy.” Now that word “hypocrite” in New Testament times was used of stage actors that wore masks and they played a part in a play. What Paul is saying is, “Don’t wear masks.” They have this big smile and they appear loving, but really, underneath it, it’s phony. They’re putting on a presentation. The church is not Broadway! We’re not trying our best to put on a show to this world, a show where we want the world to see that we’re different. We want the world to see that we’re a different kind of community, that we are a real family transformed by the power of the Gospel. We want the world to see that we have real love; love for God and love for others.

You see, it’s not about desiring to be something we’re not. That’s what a hypocrite does. He says, “Okay. I really don’t have this heart, so I’m going to pretend that I do.” And that’s not the call of the church. The call of the church is to take off that mask and be real. And if you really don’t love one another, then get to the foot of the cross where that can be taken care of. But don’t go about it by just saying, “Okay. As long as we appear to be loving to each other, that’s what it’s about in the church.” What we need is heart transformation and that’s what the Gospel offers us. And so he says, “Let love be genuine. Let it be without hypocrisy. Don’t go on a stage when you come to church and act like something is real when it’s not real.”

Let’s examine our hearts and ask, “Do I genuinely love my brothers and sisters in my own church? Am I yielding my life to God as a sacrifice to use, to help this church grow in our love for one another?”If not, let us cry out to Jesus to rescue us from our self-centered, unloving selves. That’s what Jesus loves to do when we call out to Him in humility and contrition and repentance. Here’s what Romans 5 says.

**Romans 5:5** God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

That’s the supernatural aspect of this. God doesn’t call us to *act* like we love one another. God calls us to truly, genuinely, authentically, without hypocrisy, love one another. So if you’re a believer who says, “I want my life to be genuine, but I also want to be aware of the dangers of counterfeit love. What does genuine love look like?” Paul says, “I have an answer for you.” He gives these 12 commands. I’ve grouped them into 7.

Genuine love is…

**1. Righteous. (12:9)**

***9****…**Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.*

The kind of love that is genuine isn’t just mushy sentiment. It’s strong, it’s righteous, it’s good, it’s holy. This kind of love doesn’t just avoid evil, it abhors it!This word “abhor” is a very stout term. It means to hate something with the strongest of hatred. It’s loathing it! God has taught us in this letter that sin leads to death. And that’s why love hates sin. It hates what is evil. Sin is a poison that will kill us and take our life. It will kill our brother and our sister. And we have to hate that sin in order to love them.

I often have thought to myself when a loved one physically dies, how much I hate disease. We’ve had many people in our own church who have gone to heaven and have suffered much through various diseases. And I have often though to myself for instance, “I hate cancer. I hate ALS. I hate that disease. I hate Alzheimer’s. I hate Parkinson’s. I hate heart disease.” It would be odd to hear anyone say, “I love cancer!” What?! How could you love this disease that might take my life? If you love me, you’d hate the thing that was attaching itself and attacking my person, my body. How much more the soul?

The command to love one another genuinely is defined by a hatred of sin first in our own life, but also in one another’s lives. This runs completely contrary to our world’s way of thinking. In our world’s way of thinking, if you love someone, you will always affirm their choices, whatever those choices might be. But the Gospel teaches us that if those choices of our friends, of our brothers and sisters inside the church, bring death and destruction upon them, we cannot affirm those choices. In fact, we abhor those choices. We hate those choices! Now, the person might not feel loved as they love those choices, choices toward sins that would rob them of life with God, but that’s what love actually does. It abhors what is evil and it clings to what is good. Love is the giving of oneself in diligent pursuit of God’s eternal happiness for others.

Our hatred of sin begins with the sins first that attach themselves to our own heart. We must hate our own sin first.If we hate other people’s sins without our own sins, we’ve missed the Gospel. This is a radical way to love. This quality of love surpasses the world’s aspect of love today. Modern expectations about love are that love never judges between good and evil. It doesn’t make those value judgments about one person’s choice of actions or attitudes or lifestyle. And yet here, God is most clear. Love finds no joy in sin.Love demands that we will hate the thing that keeps a person from eternal happiness in God. And that causes us to pray for that person to be freed through the Gospel. It demands that we’re willing to risk talking with them about God’s truth and about His righteousness and about His mercy and about His grace.

Now again, before we love a person by talking to them about the evil that is attacking their soul, we are right to pray to God humbly, looking for that log that may be in our own eyes before we seek to grab the speck out of our brother’s. We are right to check our hearts and say, “Am I coming out of frustration or bitterness or resentment or proud self-righteousness?” And if the answer is “yes,” we need to not talk to our brother about their sin. We need to first talk to God about our sin and bring repentance. But love abhors sin wherever it’s found.

Parents, at least healthy, sound parents, understand this basic idea that love demands they abhor what is evil. I’m so glad that I had parents who both loved me with this kind of genuine, authentic love. I can remember many times, their abhorrence of my sin helped me. There was one time when I was about 10 or 11. I was thinking about it this week. I got really angry and I said a word that I’d never said around our house before. And it was a word that was never said around our house. I’d heard my friends say it in school, but it never was said around my house. And my mom looked at me as I said it. I recognized first there was hurt in her heart, then there was concern for my soul, then there was an abhorrence of the sin, and then there was action to help me to remove myself from that sin. And it was the kind of action she had never taken before. But it helped me to see that saying that kind of word was reflective of a heart that was corrupt and I needed God and His Gospel to rescue me so that my heart and my language wouldn’t be conformed to that kind of evil. That kind of evil would destroy my life. My mom cared enough for me. She wasn’t one of those moms who said, “Well, you know. Boys will be boys. I guess boys talk that way.” She recognized that this was a serious matter for a 10 or 11 year old boy and I abhor that sin. That sin will rob my son of his life, of his soul. And like I said, that wasn’t the only sin, but a parent understands that love for what is good for their children requires they abhor the evil that would destroy their children.

Paul says not only does love abhor what is evil, but he says it clings to what is good. That word “cling” is used for glue. Love glues us to the joy of true righteousness. Paul would say this:

**1 Corinthians 13:6** (Love) does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.

It rejoices with what is righteous. Many pit love and righteousness against one another as though they are opponents. They think that if one person prioritizes righteousness, that must mean that they diminish love in their life. And if another person is really loving, that must mean they’re not really talking about righteousness all the time. And we miss the whole truth of God. God is both wholly infinitely righteous, and wholly infinitely loving. These two aren’t at war inside of the person of God, in contradiction. No! Love and righteousness are always, when it’s truly applied in a life, they’re always pulling on the same end of the rope against this weight, the weight that would pull us into a mud pit. Righteousness and love grab hold of that rope and begin to pull us out of the mud and away from it into safety.

Love and righteousness are two sides of the same coin. They’re twins congenial. They’re never contentious. We never ever have to choose between making a response to an individual that’s righteous and making a response to an individual that’s loving. If that contradiction ever comes into our thinking, understand that we’re outside the Gospel at that point. We’re outside of the character of God. We’re misunderstanding something about righteousness or something about love because those two always are joined together. Of course, it’s possible to possess a distorted version of righteousness that excludes love. The Pharisees were brilliant examples of that. Love is…

**2. Full of affection. (12:10)**

***10*** *Love one another with brotherly affection.*

He uses a term there that is used to describe warm, close, personal, family kind of love. Genuine love doesn’t say, “I love you, but keep your distance!”Genuine love is not satisfied with cold, unfeeling distance between us and the object of our love. Genuine love warms itself up toward others in the family of God and draws them, seeks to do as much as is possible. And we recognize that sometimes it’s not possible, but it’s not because of our reluctance. It’s not because of a lack of our effort, our openness, our willingness. Genuine love always pursues this kind of brotherly affection. So God’s people are not to be strangers from each other. And when we are, we need to pursue brotherly affection toward each other, where we get to know each other. God would have us to act in ways if we feel like “I’m in a church and everybody is a stranger to me.” Then let’s begin to act in ways where we’re pursuing this brotherly affection.

I remember when I was in high school, there was a Sunday School teacher in our church. I attended his class. And one Sunday, he invited us out to his house for lunch and some fun activities. From that moment on, I felt differently about him. Up to that point, he was a good teacher. I liked him. I liked his lessons. I liked his applications. After that point, he was a person who I felt cared about me, and I began to care about him. And to this day, when I see him in Peoria, I have a kind of brotherly affection toward him. And all of it is because he pursued love inside that Sunday School class for a group of 9th grade high school boys. At the end of this letter, Paul is going to say

**Romans 16:16** Greet one another with a holy kiss.

It’s the idea of brotherly affection. It’s a cultural way in which people in New Testament times in the ancient Near East greeted one another. They greeted one another with a kiss of familiarity, a closeness. But Paul would say “Greet one another with a *holy* kiss.” What he’s saying is it’s the kind of kiss that is filled with devotion to God and devotion to one another.

With all cultural symbols, and we typically have handshakes and sometimes people have hugs and sometimes people have fist bumps and high-fives. Whatever cultural way that we greet one another to say, “Hey! I’m acknowledging you and I’m acknowledging a relationship here.” All cultural communications like that can be hollowed out of any meaning, and then love is not genuine. And so he says “Make sure that when you greet one another, it’s not just simply a handshake.” That’s the way it is because that’s what you’re supposed to do, and then you walk on. No! Make sure that you have an intention to communicate affection, brotherly closeness, a bond when you greet one another, even in our greeting, you see.

**3. Honoring. (12:10)**

***10****…Outdo one another in showing honor.*

Paul says, “Love seeks to honor our brothers and sisters without expecting to be honored in return.” Genuine love in the church is often killed by expectations we place upon others to honor us. And what Paul is saying is, “Get rid of those expectations that others would honor me, and begin to have greater expectations that you would outdo everyone, far outstretch everyone else in the way that you honor them.” So much conflict, so much trouble in the church revolves around expectations we place upon other members and how they should or would treat us. We crave certain rights and certain amounts of gratitude and certain esteem and certain decisions to go the way we want them to go. And when our expectations are not met, we feel lousy about our church and about the people in the church. “They don’t care about anybody and they’re all wrong and they don’t love me.” Paul says this is what genuine love does. It doesn’t have those thoughts. What genuine love says is, “How can I outdo everybody else in this church family in honoring everyone else in this church family? How can I do that?” How much trouble and conflict would be removed if we simply said, “I want others to be honored way before I am honored.”

How much peace and happiness would the church of Jesus experience if each of us had this attitude and we said, “I want to sing the songs my brothers and sisters want to sing. I don’t want to be honored with a choice of songs that I would choose. I don’t want that. I want to honor my brothers and sisters.” Does that change the way we think about things? “I want to make sure that I thank people. I know I do some stuff around here and I might not get thanked, but that’s completely okay. What’s not okay is if I’m not spending my time outdoing other people in honor and the way I thank the people who are greeting at the door or the people who are ushering, the people who are serving in the nursery, the Sunday School teachers, and everyone else I see contributing to the life of this body. I want to thank them and I’m not really concerned at all if I ever get thanked whatsoever.” Genuine love outdoes one another in honor. “I want to visit those who are sick and offer meals to them and I’m not focused on whether other people visit me. I want to ask my brothers and sisters how I can pray for them and I realize that they have so many needs that they might not be thinking about how they can pray for me. And that’s okay because I’m just interested in outdoing others in honor.” Love measures itself not by how others are honoring us, but by how we are honoring our brothers and sisters. Outdo one another in showing honor.

**4. Serving. (12:11)**

***11*** *Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.*

Love is an action. It’s hard work. It requires that we expend energy for the good of others. If we’re not expending energy inside to contribute to love, building relationships, ministering together in the church, we’re not loving without hypocrisy. There is a counterfeit nature because genuine love always is energetic. It’s zealous. It’s not slothful.

Jesus told this parable of one guy getting five talents, another guy getting two, and another guy getting one. And the people with the five talents and two talents went out and they invested it and they had a return. And when the king came back, the master came back, they showed him the return. And the master said this:

**Matthew 25:21 & 23** His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant.You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’

But the third servant said “I knew you were a hard master, and so I just kept this. So here’s the one talent you gave me. I’m going to give it back. I buried it in the ground. I’m going to give it right back to you.” And this is what the master says to him.

**Matthew 25:26-30** But his master answered him, ‘You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness.’

Do you think God is concerned about love in His church? “Slothful” describes the unrighteous servant who didn’t bother to invest his master’s money. He didn’t labor for investment, but just buried it in the ground. Genuine love serves one another in the body of Christ.

***11*** *Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.*

**5. Rejoicing. (12:12)**

***12*** *Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation,*

Paul has already used this word “hope” to bring to present view a future day when we as believers are going to be gathered around Jesus’ throne and we’re going to be glorified. We’re going to be perfected. We’re going to become like Jesus because we’ll see Him as He is. And we have this hope. It’s an expectation of that future day actually taking place. So in the context of love, he says it’s actually, “Rejoice in *the* hope.” It’s the hope that we’re all looking forward to that future day.

Genuine love rejoices that our brothers and sisters will be with us at that future day. It envisions it. It expects it with certainty and with eagerness. When we together will stand before God and we’ll be glorified. And we will see them become what God had guaranteed they would become. And they’re not that right now. They’re filled with failings. They’re filled with feebleness. They’re filled with weaknesses and sins. And all those things bother us and hurt us as we relate. But here’s what genuine love is. Love doesn’t just simply look at that individual and see them as they are now. Love says, “That’s the way it’s going to be. I want to treat them now with a view that that’s going to be the certain eternity so that I’m not embarrassed and ashamed before my Father who loves me, for the way I treated them now, without having hope. I’m rejoicing in the hope of that future fellowship and of that future completion of that individual’s salvation.” So genuine love rejoices that our brother and sister will be glorified, and they treat them as people who will be glorified.

I’ll use an illustration. My son, Jackson…I think he was four years old when he took up the violin. He wanted to play the violin like crazy. Our older two didn’t want to play any instruments. We didn’t think we had any musicians in our family. Jackson, at four years old, said, “Please allow me to play the violin.” So we took him to violin lessons. How many times can a parent hear *Go Tell Aunt Rhody* screeched out on a little violin without losing their faculties? (Congregational Laughter!)

Now here’s what helped. We’d go to the concerts where other students would be and some of them were older students. We’d listen to these older students and say, “Wow! They’re really good. You mean if Jackson stays the course he’ll be that? Okay, Jackson, play.” So hearing the screeching sounds was not as unpleasant when I thought about a future. And now, I can’t tell you how much joy I have when Jackson comes home and he plays the violin or he plays the piano. This is the nearest thing to heaven to me. But when he was little, I had to envision a future day or else I’d say, “Jackson! Put that thing down. It’s irritating me.” When we see each other, there’s a lot of things about our lives that are going to irritate one another because there’s still a lot of sin that God is weeding out of our hearts. But he says “Rejoice in the hope.” Know that’s not where any of us who are in Christ are going to be. Love does that.

**6. Praying. (12:12)**

***12****…be constant in prayer.*

Genuine love prays for one another. A lot of gossip and slander would be resolved if we simply would just go before the Lord with the needs of our brothers and sisters and say, “God, would you help? This brother or sister is struggling.” God listens to our prayers and love intercedes for them.

**7. Generous. (12:13)**

***13*** *Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.*

That word “seek” means “chasing after” like a hunter chases after a wounded deer. It’s a strenuous pursuit. It says, “I want to reach out and bring people into the very center of my life, into my home, so that I can get to know them and so that I can love them. That’s what genuine love does. And it causes us to ask the question, “Am I opening up my life and my home to my brothers and sisters in my church family?”

God is calling us to pursue a genuine love that reflects Jesus. We are the body of Jesus. He has given us a love that is tangible, a love that is open hearted, a love that is humble, it’s enduring, a love that seeks God’s eternal glory. God is glorified in a church where members open their hearts to one another regardless of past sins. Such a church is strong and happy and fruitful. God will not be glorified in a church that has members closing their hearts to one another! Such a church is weak and sad and fruitless. Jesus said

**John 13:34-35** A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

One of God’s precious servants, Billy Graham, is rejoicing this Sunday in heaven, perfected. This is one quote that I thought I would share with you from many that could be shared. “We are the Bibles the world is reading; We are the creeds the world is needing; We are the sermons the world is heeding.” Friends, this is God’s will for us; His good, acceptable and perfect will.