**A Loving Community**

**Romans 12:9-11 (ESV)**

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Pastor Josh Beakley

We’re in Romans chapter 12. We’re learning what it means to live out community in action. So we’re covering that chapter and diving into the middle of a letter that Paul wrote to an early church there in Rome. In the first eleven chapters, he describes the Gospel message and the hope that we have in God and what He has done in creating this community of Jew and Gentile, of people following Jesus. Now in chapters 12-16, we learn the practical outworking of that and how we live that out together in real life. So here we are. Our series is *Community in Action*.

***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.*

When I was traveling around various markets and shops overseas, time and time again, I would encounter these counterfeit products, fake items. There was apparel from Nike. There was a shirt or shoes or socks from Adidas or Reebok. There was imitation NBA footwear. There were replica wristwatches of all kinds. The apparel often had something humorous about it. It was misspelled or the letters would be switched around backwards or the logo would be upside down or there would be different numbers of stripes. The watches, though, with the most valuable product they would put the most effort into the counterfeit. There are these Rolexes that people have gone to great lengths to imitate, but never to ultimate success. You can read about all the ways to tell if it’s a fake Rolex, whether it’s just the smooth silence of the second hand motion or the minute distinct engraving of the serial number. But there are these things about it that set it apart. It turns out that the more amazing the product, the more difficult it is to counterfeit and the more the real thing stands out as true, unique, genuine.

There is no shortage of counterfeits in the world. But no counterfeit has been more attempted without success than the effort to counterfeit love. Whether it’s upward love for God or outward love for others, relationships both vertical and horizontal is a supreme counterfeit product. Fake relationships abound. That’s part of what makes the real deal stand out so beautifully. True love, authentic love is actually something that comes from God. It can’t be manufactured by humans. Perfect love ultimately must come from a source more powerful than us. It must come from above. That’s why we’re gathered today. It’s because of love from above. Relationship not only with each other but with God has been made possible because of Jesus. The love of God is expressed.

As Jesus, God as a man came and lived a life we could never live. Then He paid the debt that we deserved, that we just sang about, and He offered His life in our place. The good news of this Gospel message is that God’s love has been shed. Not only has it been shown through Jesus, but it actually is applied to us as we trust in Him and we’re transformed by Him. Now we’re empowered to live as His followers in a way that’s different. We’re empowered to live as people with genuine love from above. Not as a counterfeit, but the real thing. So in our series on community, we’re talking about not just following Jesus, but following Jesus together. This is where life gets difficult because that’s where the mess is made manifest and where the love of God is most tested. It’s the authenticity test here in community.

Plenty of religions claim to offer powerful religious experiences or these encounters in solitude and ecstatic experiences. But that’s not where the divine love is really shown and seen. It’s not in these encounters that are isolated, but it’s ultimately as we live God’s love out amongst one another. In the context of Christian community, that’s where we start to see the genuineness of the love of God.

There were all kinds of religions in Paul’s day. A lot of them talked about love and powerful experiences, but for Jesus’ followers, this idea of church was different. It was made up of people who loved each other in ways that were unexplainable and not duplicated anywhere else. Few places made it more clear than the church at Rome because there were Jews and Gentiles getting along. This hadn’t happened for thousands of years! Jews and Gentiles worshiping side by side was unheard of. It was more shocking than any kind of division we might imagine in our own day. There were Jews and Gentiles who were gathering to share in common following Jesus together. This is what the Gospel was doing. It’s the power of God to salvation. Everyone believes.

Paul didn’t even know this church. He hadn’t been there, but he had heard the testimony. He knew they were following Jesus and doing it together. He wrote to them because he was eager to proclaim this Gospel message. He wasn’t ashamed of this Gospel message, even though he himself had been an opponent. He was a Jew and he had opposed anybody who thought about bringing reconciliation between the Jews and Gentiles. No! That’s abominable! He was against it, yet here, now he’s been transformed by this message. This is what God does. What’s more shocking, and Paul takes the first half of the letter to explain that it’s not just that Jews and Gentiles are together. What’s much more shocking is that man has been reconciled with God! This is amazing! This was impossible! He takes the first eleven chapters to explain what God has done in Jesus. We who were desperate sinners and guilty before God, by grace He has given His Son. Now as we trust in Him, our sins have been atoned for. We’ve been reconciled to God and now we can enjoy community with each other. This amazing truth that Paul explains is what then now empowers us to actually live out God’s love amongst each other in the world around us. The Gospel is transforming.

You see in his other letters where he talks about now this community is a place where a husband and wife actually love each other tenderly and in a way that’s forgiving. It’s where parent and child are honoring and serving and masters seek the good of the other. It’s where relationships in the community are being transformed. People say it changes my life and it’s true. What is it that causes community to thrive so powerfully that it actually outlasted the empire of Rome? At its heart was something mysterious, yet amazing. It was true love, the real thing.

The real thing stands out. A true love made of relationship makes togetherness possible. It wasn’t generated by people. It was a love first that came from God. That was the real thing. It was shared through this message called the Gospel. It’s a love that had transformed Paul himself and transformed these Jews and Gentiles here in Rome. It’s a message that Paul loved and celebrated and knew it would be tested through their togetherness and unity.

Paul lays the foundation again of this Gospel. God called them (Romans 1:7). He poured out this love in their hearts through the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). It’s a love that is demonstrated through the love of Christ in His death (Romans 5:8). It’s a love from which nothing can separate us (Romans 8:35). It’s a love through which we have the promise to overwhelmingly conquer any other challenge that we might face (Romans 8:37). This love now is at work amongst Jew and Gentile according to the plan of God. This is the foundation of togetherness. We follow Jesus, but we do so together. The way that we show true love always must first come because we have known true love through the Gospel message, believing that message transforms us. It transforms not only how we understand our relationship with God, but with one another and even our enemies. We see that all unfolding here in chapter 12.

Here we are, having seen that now as followers of Jesus, we’re actually living sacrifices on the altar. Now we’re actually active members of His body. We learned last week about using our gifts. We’re also members of His family. So today we’re looking at what it means to experience and express God’s love as a family together, as members of the family. When you think about the context of spiritual gifts, remember the church at Corinth. There were lots of powerful spiritual gifts and very exciting things. People would live those out and they were excited about it, but Paul reminded them in 1 Corinthians 13 that all of these gifts, while impressive in an earthly sense, without love, they are nothing.

You see, they must serve a purpose. They must edify. They must serve an end towards relationship of love for God and love for others. They’re guided by this principle of love. Otherwise, these gifts are just like instruments that the kids kind of sneak in and try to play. They just sneak over there and play on the drum set. Don’t get any ideas, but you start to hear just the clanging cymbals. That’s what a church feels like when there are lots of gifted people doing things, but it’s not about love. It’s a big lot of noise. Paul is describing here that spiritual gifts are great, but now he turns his attention to love because relationship must guide how we live as a community. This is what will cause a community to thrive.

Without love, the very things designed to unite us will actually divide. Whether it’s preaching the Word, if we don’t have love and there is rivalry, it’s going to lead towards some kind of favoritism. It’s going to lead towards singing a praise that is designed to unite, but instead it’s going to divide based on styles. Whether we’re wearing a nametag to be friendly or a bracelet to celebrate togetherness, it has become a symbol of status that makes people feel excluded. Without love, this is how things that are designed to be good or hoped to be good end up actually becoming divisive and worthless. Paul says love must be at the center of this community. The only way that a true community is going to thrive through the use of these gifts is if it’s done in love. This kind of love is going to stand out.

I hope you’re praying for us to experience a biblical community that is thriving. Maybe you’re even wondering how do I contribute towards this kind of a community? Those of us who are following Jesus want to ask how do we do together better? There are a few ways that we’re going to look at this morning that cause Christian love to stand out and that cause community to thrive. There are a few defining marks. In the first service I only made my way through two. So we will see what happens during the second service. First is this. Biblical community thrives when we’re real. The first defining mark is

**#1 Genuineness: True Love Matters (12:9a)**

It matters that love is true.

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

It’s actually the heading that forms the center point of the rest of the message. All of it circles around this idea of true love, of being genuine. That love is grounded in reality. The rest of these bullet thoughts that Paul gives really just unpack what true love looks like. Genuine love is real.

A lot of you know this experience. It’s been years since you’ve seen this friend. They reach out to you and you’re excited. They invite you to go and get a meal or a coffee or something. So you’re getting together and you’re reminiscing and this is great! Then all of a sudden, the conversation takes a turn in an unexpected way and they say something like, “Have you ever heard of such and such a product?” (Laughter!) Now, I’m not saying that there isn’t a place for networking or business, but there is a way to go about it. There is a dynamic that we experience where it’s done in genuine love and genuine interest. Then there is also a line that someone might cross where we feel like we’re being taken advantage of. We feel like the relationship is being leveraged for somebody else’s good. We feel like we’re being used.

Paul is talking about spiritual gifts. They are great things to serve the body. Look at all these gifts. You might think, what’s my gift and how do I serve the body? How do I build the community? Right at the beginning, he says to hold on and make sure that your love is genuine because otherwise, it’s going to cause a whole lot of problems. There is a sort of kindness that is not genuine. It’s not real. That can happen at church just as easily as anywhere else. It’s sort of like imitation sugar. You think it’s good until you have the bitter aftertaste. Or it’s like being given counterfeit money. You realize it doesn’t have any value. It’s not real. We live in a social media-filtered world that covers up what’s really going on.

When I was in California, I worked for the city as like a weekend warrior, kind of working doing security and other stuff. I would just do whatever they told me to do. They had this festival that they would do. It was the Cowboy Festival at the Melody Ranch. We’d go there and they would have this huge western street. It was beautiful. It had all these different buildings. They would film commercials there. It was all a big giant façade. It looked authentic, but if you opened the door of a building there was nothing behind it. It was just messy and dusty and nails sticking out. You could just close that door and go back to the old west. But whatever you do, don’t open any doors. Sometimes that’s what it’s like at church. Not just walking into the building, but walking into a home or some kind of group or gathering we think this is great. But don’t open any doors or don’t knock on the door. Some people are like, “Are you knocking on my door? Are you asking a question like that? We don’t do that at church. We look great up here.” This is what Paul says.

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

In fact, the word in Greek is the word *agape*. Agape was a unique kind of love. It was not the love that the Greeks cherished particularly. It was a distinguishing love that the Christians sort of grabbed hold of because it was costly sacrificial love. It was committed love. So Paul says to love each other, but love without hypocrisy.

Hypocrisy in that context, you think about what Jesus had said about hypocrites and the Pharisees. They were people who were putting on a show. That’s what they had done there within the Greek culture. They had stage acting and they would put on masks. They would put on a happy mask or a sad mask, whatever it was, and they would go and perform and do the thing. Then they would go back down and be who they really were. That’s hypocrisy, and the Pharisees were great at it. They were great at playing religion, looking good, having a façade. Paul is saying to love without hypocrisy. Take off the mask and love for real. Don’t love in sort of the Hollywood reality tv, flattery, say one thing and then behind their back say another thing. Love for real. Christian love is to be genuine. It’s agape love.

Where does that kind of love come from? We don’t generate it. It’s not man made. That kind of love comes from God. It’s produced by the Holy Spirit. It’s a fruit of the Spirit. So Paul is calling us to love the way that God loves. That only happens if we’ve experienced the love of God. It’s a love that’s not a game. It’s not fake. It’s not an outward show. It’s not hypocritical. It’s not counterfeit. It’s not disingenuous. It’s not with pretense. It’s not a masquerade. It has no ulterior motives. It’s not pretending. It’s not self-centered. It is love not under disguise. It’s without hypocrisy. It’s genuine.

One of the words that we use to convey that is sincere. That word comes from the Latin where it talks about sincere meaning without wax. They would have pottery and they would try to sell pottery. There would be a crack because the pottery would get old. So they would put wax on it to kind of cover up all the cracks and make it seem like it was good quality. People would hold it up to the light and see if they could melt the wax. They could see if it was doctored up. If it wasn’t doctored up, they would be able to give it a seal and say this thing is without wax. It’s the real artifact. It’s genuine. Paul says your love as a Christian should be sincere. It should be genuine, real. True love matters and if biblical community is going to thrive, this is the starting point. It’s real. It’s genuine. That’s the defining mark of a disciple. Jesus said

**John 13:35** By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

The world is going to express a kind of shortsighted, hypocritical love. But this true, genuine agape love is what Jesus showed and what He produces through His Spirit and His followers. He said

**Matthew 6:1** “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them,

This verse in Romans, the way that it’s structured and kind of every other verse that hangs on it all the way down to verse 13, this rapid fire reminds you of the Beatitudes, when Jesus was talking. It reminds you of this different way of approaching worship of God that is not for people, but it’s genuine for God and for the good of others.

So you think about this idea of hypocrisy and being fake. I despise that! When people are fake with me we think, “I just really get worn out by that. I don’t like it. I can’t take it anymore. I can’t stomach it.” Who is the person who suffered the most hypocrisy? Some of us might think no one has faced more fake love than me, but there is one who has. No one has suffered more hypocritical fake pretend love than God. From the beginning, God’s people have constantly been pretending in relationship with Him. He says

**Matthew 15:8** “‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me;

They’re doing all this stuff for outward show. He would say in Isaiah, “I’m so tired of these rituals, these things that you’re doing. Your hearts are not hearts of true worship. I want relationship.”

Not only that, but Jesus came as a man. He walked among these people. Here were the Pharisees, the religious leaders of the day, living as hypocrites. They would put on this outward show and Jesus said, don’t be like that. Not only that, there was His own disciple, Judas. At one time, he faked affection for the poor. He said,

**John 12:5-6** “Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?” He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it.

He has such a heart of selfish interest and inauthentic love that it was painfully pictured in the betrayal of Christ with a kiss.

**Luke 22:48** but Jesus said to him, “Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?

There is something so unsettling about counterfeit love. God has endured and suffered the counterfeit love more than anyone. God says don’t love like that. Don’t play games. Love in the church is to be like the love of God, which is a genuine love for the good of the other. It’s a personal sacrifice for the highest good of the other. The motivation and the empowerment for that kind of love doesn’t come from within. It doesn’t come from us. It comes from God Himself. He says, “I have shown you this love in my Son. I’ve given you this love in my Spirit. Live it out now by my strength.” This is what Paul is saying. You’ve been given spiritual gifts, but do it in a spiritual way through love, through relationship without hypocrisy. This is the calling to true love and genuineness, which manifests in so many different ways.

The idea is not to try to apply this to somebody else’s life, but to apply it to our own. Are there times when I tell people I’ll pray for them and I actually don’t? Are there times when I’m smiling when someone is talking, but I’m really just waiting for my turn to say what I want to say? Or I ask a question that I don’t actually care about the answer to. There are times when I tell someone, “you can call me anytime,” but then I’m intentionally avoiding and ignoring them. Or I consistently create my schedule to be so busy that whenever I engage with someone who might be in need that God makes me aware of, I have no time for it. All these kinds of things are the kinds of things that can build up this façade of self-righteousness and then erode the foundation of real relationship.

So we ask what am I doing to either help the church grow as a fortress of self-righteousness for religious hypocrites or as a harbor of grace for repentant sinners? What God is saying and Paul is saying is you’ve been given gifts and you can actually do that. As you genuinely love from the love of God, you will make this community a harbor of grace. It will be a precious place where people fly to the Savior. We’re well aware of the warning that Moody would say, that there are a lot of people who talk cream and live skim milk. So we ask, is our Christian love true? Is it real?

Some of you might be saying, “No. Of course not! I’m playing the game, just like everybody else.” Well, according to Paul, according to the New Testament and the testimony of many, I can say that actually, everybody here isn’t playing a game. It’s real! There are people who are experiencing true genuine love. It could be that you’ve been going through the motions. It could be that you’ve never actually experienced it and that this is an opportunity to say, maybe this isn’t a game Maybe there is something real to this. Or it could be that you’ve just been suppressing it for a long time and today is the day that God is reminding you of this truth and you’re saying, I’m going to take a moment and actually reevaluate. Am I going to God for the kind of love that He offers and then living that out?

Some of you might be in a crisis right now. You’re facing chronic suffering or you’re in this situation where you’re providing care giving and you’ve just gotten used to how superficial some forms of love can be. You’ve experienced that fake love and you’re at the end of your patience with it. Maybe you’ve been disappointed. It’s not wrong to recognize right here that’s not what it should be like. Love should be genuine. It’s not superficial, but it should be supernatural. As you do, you remember that God is always genuine. His love is entirely real and you can go to Him for that kind of love. It’s not shallow like man’s love. But then also recognize that there is a love that God has for His people that He gives. He calls us to live that kind of forgiveness and tender-heartedness out with one another. That’s a challenging thing, but it’s what we’re called into and we look to God for hope.

As families, one of the best gifts you can give your children is an example of genuine faith, rather than teaching them how to be a hypocrite, how to play the game, or act the part. You’re genuine in your faith, which sometimes means that we say, “This is what God is like.” Then sometimes we say, “What I just did this morning is not what God is like.” You can ask our kids and they’ll say, “Yes, I know. That’s not what God is like.” They see it. They know it. So we long for God to help us to live genuine love out, but also to be honest when it’s not true.

Maybe you’re in a situation where you’re more isolated and this talk about community is pretty discouraging. Whether it’s within the group or maybe you’re just living on your own, there is a great temptation to sort of have two separate lives. There is a great temptation to live one way in the community with a façade and then another way on your own and you start to get deeper and deeper in some kind of discouragement or some kind of sin. You think, “I’m on my own. No one cares.” This call for genuine love is something that you can trust is not empowered by people. It’s empowered by God. You can have courage and say, “I’m going to ask somebody for help. I’m going to share my life because this is what we’re called into.” We’re called into a community of real people and we’re going to share in it.

I can say praise God that there are a lot of expressions of genuine love. A lot of it is not seen. It goes under the radar, but it is happening. Yes, you can see hypocrisy. That’s the human way. You’ll see it everywhere. But there are plenty of examples of genuine Christian love and when that happens, it’s a pleasing aroma, a living sacrifice to the glory of God. We say I can sense the aroma of Jesus. May we live that way, because true love matters. But secondly, it’s not only real and free from hypocrisy. It’s also free from mere sentimentality. It’s marked not only by genuineness, but also by

**#2 Righteousness: True Love Has Standards (12:9b)**

This is different than niceness. True love has standards. Our initial human reaction is that this doesn’t sound like love. But true love actually manifests according to the standards of God. You see how Paul talks about love being genuine. Typically, when you see or hear someone talking about love, the next word you think of is not “abhor,” but that’s what you see.

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

You see the parameters. He turns to morality here and he gives these two extreme examples. Abhor is a very strong word for shudder and terror or be disgusted by or loathe or step away from. It’s not just to avoid, but sort of step back in horror away from evil. Then cling or super glue or apoxy or cement yourself to what is good. He gives sort of the negative and the positive to talk about genuine love, true biblical love.

It’s sort of like the idea of a doctor who loves their patient. If they love their patient, they’re going to hate the disease or the cancer that is starting to attack and eat away at their patient. They abhor that thing. You don’t want to see it on a scan. You don’t want to see it anywhere. You don’t want to even hear the words. Get that out of here because I love this person. In a world where there is both good and evil, true love is going to manifest in very clear ways that are defined by God as righteousness.

What we’re tempted to think is that the world’s love isn’t like that. But the truth is that it is. The world has standards. The world will say something like, “Love is universal acceptance. This is fine.” But the world has its own standards and its rules and authorities by which it dictates what you should avoid and what you should embrace. If you don’t follow the standards that the world sets, if you fail to honor those standards, you will suffer consequences. You will be hated. There is no room for God’s standards with the world.

God gives us His standard of righteousness. He tells us what is good and evil and the world will not be able to stomach it. It will start to abhor those things and you will feel it, whether you’re in a business meeting, whether you’re sitting on an airplane, whether you’re having a conversation with a waiter or something. You realize that what you say will be disgusting to someone who has a different standard of righteousness. They’re like, “That’s so unloving.” Even if you try to say it in a certain way and package it in all kinds of ways, at the end of the day, if the standard of righteousness is different than the world, the world will reject it.

The standards that God sets are true righteousness of good and evil. Whenever we look at it, we realize that in our own human flesh, we fail. That’s Paul’s point in the whole first chapter. You’ve failed! Everybody, we’ve all failed before the Law of God. The beauty is that there is someone who didn’t fail. There is someone who met God’s standard of righteousness to the full measure. He perfectly upheld and turned from evil at every point in His own life. He called others to repent. He stood against hypocrisy in every way, even when He went to the temple of God and He saw that they had turned it into a big market. They were opposing people who were poor. They had to come and they were exchanging money just to try to pray and sacrifice. They were making it hard for people to get to God. Jesus, because He loved those people, His meekness manifested through whips driving those moneychangers out. It was a righteous zeal that was manifested because of true love. It was biblical love.

Biblical love is not the way that the world would have us think. Sometimes we imagine love to be where we say something like, “I love you, but it would be kind of good if you came to church. I love you, but there is this thing called the Gospel and I know you won’t like it.” No, it’s not, “I love you, but…” It’s I love you enough to invite you to the place where there is life. I love you enough to tell you that you need Jesus just as much as me. I love you enough to tell you that there is hope in salvation and that without Him, there is death and judgment. This is true love. It’s love the way that God calls us into.

We might say that makes it sound like God’s love is conditional. I thought it was unconditional. I understand to a certain degree, but I think David Powlison makes a good point. He writes an article that says God’s love is better than unconditional. He says it’s contra-conditional, meaning God doesn’t love us because of who we are. He loves us despite who we are. God doesn’t love us because we’ve not broken any conditions or standards of righteousness. No, He loves us even though we’ve broken His conditions and standards of righteousness. He has shown that love and demonstrated that while we were sinners, Christ died for us.

God’s love doesn’t make sense, yet He not only has lived that life on our behalf and upheld those standards that we never could. But now He pours out His Spirit in our hearts so that we’re actually transformed and become more righteous like Him. He can make us who we’re to become, like Christ. It’s a miracle! It’s a miracle just like being saved, to be made more righteous, to become more like God, to live that love out. To see that in people is amazing! When you see that kind of maturity happen, it’s a kind of love whereby we love like God. We love according to righteousness and whereby we have less and less ability to tolerate the evil that we used to. We used to stomach certain kinds of conversations, certain kinds of jokes, certain kinds of relationships, certain kinds of movies and all of a sudden, we just can’t stomach it anymore. It becomes disgusting to us! That’s not a loss of maturity. That’s a growth in maturity. I can’t stand that kind of evil anymore, and all of a sudden, we’re also longing for the good. We get a taste of it and we say, “I love that. I need more of it.” We stick to it and we cling to it.

**1 Peter 2:11** Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.

More and more, we wake up each day and say, “I need to put these things out of my life and hold fast because it’s going to destroy me.” That’s how love works its way out. True love is going to manifest not only through genuineness and not through just niceness, but righteousness. It is joyful and happy about the things that make God happy and also grieves and is sad about the things that make God sad. How do we know those things? It’s through His Word. But it’s going to be tough in a world where there are drawn up sides.

You can take it in any way you want. Politics may be one where there are going to be sides, as if you have to align with the side. Realize that there are moments where any particular person is going to denounce some kind of unrighteousness perhaps, but also start to slide in other forms of unrighteousness. It can be tempting to start to settle for “I’m okay with this kind of unrighteousness so long as we make some kind of progress in life.” We have to recognize that true love would cause us to go back to the righteous standard of God and say that there are times where I have to celebrate the things that God would celebrate and I also have to grieve the things that God would grieve. I have to abhor what is evil and hold fast to what is good. I can’t settle for whatever kind of counterfeit the world is offering because evil does have a polluting effect. James would say to the church there,

**James 4:**4 …Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?

Yes, we share the Gospel, but we recognize that if you wish to be a friend of the world, you make yourself an enemy of God. God jealously desires for our heart to be given to Him and then to appeal to the world to be reconciled to God. But there is a danger that we recognize that true love understands that it’s defined by righteousness. There are standards. We cannot both love God and love sin. It’s just like we cannot both love our spouse and then love the person we’re having an affair with. You will love the one and hate the other. We tend to try to imagine that it will be okay. We have some particular sin, how we’re using our time or how we’re using our money. In the moment when we’re engaging in that activity and our spouse or our family or a friend asks us something about that, we will be disgusted by it. We abhor it. We pull away because we love our sin. In these moments, Paul is saying genuine love is to

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

There are going to be moments where God is going to bring things to light. Just like we had our series on repentance, the life of a Christian is going to be that your eyes are opened. As true loving people come into your life and point you to the Word of God and the love of Christ, you can be forgiven and actually changed. You say “I love God. I’m going to put this away. I want God more. I want relationship with God more and relationship with people more.” True love is going to manifest in a way that you will never see outside of the church.

I know people in our church family who are responding to the Spirit at work. Their mind is being renewed and they’re being transformed day by day and they are setting aside. There are people who have quit jobs. They have forgiven wrongs. They have expressed sorrow. They’ve canceled subscriptions. They’ve redefined relationships. They’ve embraced accountability. They’ve started to live out courageous Christianity. They’re sharing the Gospel. They’re testifying of Jesus. People are responding. That is happening. Praise God! That is happening. But the question for us is not, “I see that in somebody else. I know what that looks like. I know how other people can grow.” The question and test for true biblical community and love for us is what about the genuineness and the righteousness of the love that God has poured out in me? May we be prayerful and humble that God would grow us in that as a church family!