

# “Love Indubitably” // Romans 12:9–13 // Romans #26

Today, Romans 12, we are going to talk about one of everyone’s favorite subjects: LOVE. Here’s how I know it’s one of your favorites: It’s October, and many of you have ALREADY started streaming the Hallmark Christmas movies.

Be honest. You know who you are. Some of you guys even get in on it--you act like it’s your wife’s thing, but all know the truth.

You watch these things **even though you know the plot** is literally, always the same: Will the upwardly-mobile-yet-deeply-conflicted girl go with the slick guy from the big city or the unassuming, flannel-wearing guy from the small town who has a penchant for witty banter and turns out, at the end of the movie, to be Santa's nephew, or something like that.

It's **OCTOBER**, and you already need your Hallmark Christmas movie fix, and that’s because you're love junkies. You might as well face it, you’re addicted to love.

Well, here in chapter 12, starting in vs. 9 and following, Paul’s going to give us a glimpse into what true love is. **Not so much romantic love**, though what we learn today will certainly have implications for that--but the kind of love the gospel creates in a community.

**What is it that makes Christians love each other?** What enables them to live in love with each other? Is it that they truly just like each other? They think the same?

- Many of you know our campus pastor at the new CPC, JM (pic of JM/Ashley)...
- **What makes followers of Jesus love each other?**

Jesus said the single-most defining characteristic of his church should be its love.

- **Your love for each other**, he told the disciples, is how the world will recognize that you belong to me.
  - At the end of the day it’s not an eloquent or intelligent defense of the faith that convinces the world of the truth of the gospel; It’s **love in the church**.
  - It’s like **Francis Schaeffer said**: Love on display in the church is Jesus’s final apologetic to the world.
- **I really think that if we were doing this**, we wouldn’t **depend on mail-outs, slick programs, or special services** to attract people to our church. People would be beating the doors down to get in.

**So, what does that love look like and where does it come from?**

- Vv. 9–13 discuss our love toward our friends
- Vv. 14–21 are about love toward our enemies
- (We’ll look at vv. 9–13 this week, and vv. 14–21 the following week.)

**BTW, it’s important to keep in mind that** everything Paul says in Romans 12 (and everything from here on out in Romans), is his explanation of what a life lived in response to the gospel looks like.

- **The hinge of the whole book of Romans is Romans 12:1:**  
*Therefore: Therefore, in light of the mercies of God, this is what your lives should look like.*

**6 characteristics** of gospel-shaped love. (Or you might think of this as 6 principles of gospel-shaped friendship)

## 1. Our love should be without hypocrisy (vs. 9)

<sup>9</sup> Let love be without hypocrisy.

- **Love should be sincere. Non-phony.**

- Churches, particularly churches here in the South, can be places of phony love. Am I right? Everybody seems nice and polite on the outside; helpful, even warm.
- But sometimes **underneath that veneer** you find a heart full of backbiting, jealousy, judgmentalism and gossiping.<sup>1</sup>
  - One of the **worst Southern phrases is “bless his heart.”** That means, “What I just said is really mean, but I’m going to make it by seasoning it with some Southern politeness.
  - Or, people who love to gossip in the form of “prayer requests”: Let me tell you something you need to be praying about.
- Maybe you have experienced **that kind of phony love** in the church, and maybe it really turned you off. People were nice to your face but vicious behind your back.
- **Jesus called people like this “whitewashed tombs.”** Beautiful on the outside, but full of death on the inside. And the closer you get to somebody’s heart, the more you sense that. No amount of politeness, or pleasantness of personality, can cover over what’s rotting on the inside.
  - **A few years ago I cranked up my car on a November morning** and when the heater fan kicked on it made a weird sound, like something was grinding. But then it stopped, and I assumed whatever the problem was had worked itself out. Not always the best posture to take toward your car, btw. But everything seemed to be fine.
  - Well, the next morning I got in, and it smelled kind of weird--not terrible, just weird; but every day it got worse; /deodorizer over vent / vacuumed the inside; Febreze--no deodorant is covering over that!)
- **That’s what “love with hypocrisy” is like.** Paul says our love should be different. It should be genuine, not a feature of our personality but a genuine attitude of our hearts.

**Now, that’s an easy thing to say, right,** but the problem with loving people is that they have flaws. Annoying flaws. Flaws that hurt you. So how can love be without hypocrisy when people annoy you, hurt you, and some of them you just don’t like that much?

- **Well, that’s where the gospel kicks in.** The gospel enables you to love someone despite their flaws in a way that nothing else can, because it puts you in touch with the tenderness of God for you.
  - **Recently** in our family devotions we were reading through a John Piper devotion where he tells the story from Matt 18 of the man forgiven 10K talents—it really is my favorite parable. It wrecked me again.

**Basic gist is this: A King had a servant who owed him 10K talents.** The ginormous size of this amount gets lost on us, but it’s illuminated by the fact that King Herod, the incredibly wealthy king of Israel, had a year *income* of 900 talents.” The entire tax revenue of Israel in those days was 200 talents per year. This was an incalculable debt. Like “a gazillion dollars.”<sup>2</sup>

**So, the King threatens to sell him and his family to pay the debt,** which is what happened in those days.

*vs. 26: “At this, the servant fell facedown before him and said, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you everything’”<sup>27</sup> Then the master of that servant had compassion, released him, and forgave him the loan.”*

**The forgiveness, says Piper, is as spectacular as the size of the debt,** and that is the point! Jesus wants us to realize that sin is an incalculable debt we could never pay back! No

<sup>1</sup> Tim Keller, *R8–16FY*, 117.

<sup>2</sup> John Piper, *What Jesus Demands from the World*, 147.

amount of contrition or good works can repay the debt of dishonor we have heaped upon God through our sin.<sup>3</sup>

**But this servant in Jesus' story didn't receive the forgiveness** for what it was—stunning, breathtaking, and undeserved. The man never even says a single word of thanks!

**And incredibly**, when this man walks out of the courtroom, he encounters a man who owes him a single denarius (the one-day wage of a poor man). He seizes this man, begins to choke him, saying, "Pay me what you owe."

The man pleads for patience, but this man will show none, and he puts him in prison until he can pay the debt.

**The king hears about it and is legitimately angry.** He brings the man back in and says,

*"You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. <sup>33</sup>Shouldn't you also have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?" <sup>34</sup>And because he was angry, he handed him over to the jailers... until he could pay everything that was owed."*

**Jesus' conclusion goes right to the heart:** <sup>35</sup>*So also my heavenly Father will do to you unless every one of you forgives his brother or sister from your heart."*

**John Piper:** The point of this parable is that God has no obligation to save a person who claims to be his disciple if you have not received the gift of forgiveness for what it really is—infinitely precious, amazing, undeserved, heart-humbling, mercy-awakening. If we claim to be forgiven by Jesus, but

there is no sweetness of forgiveness (or patience or love) in our hearts for others, God's forgiveness is (simply) not there (in our heart).<sup>4</sup>

- **People that have been moved by the gospel have a sweetness in worship**--they just want to say 'thank you' to God, and a tenderness toward others that comes from recognizing how much we've been loved despite our flaws and how much we've been forgiven of.

**So, what do you do when you feel like your love has hypocrisy in it?**

Do you just throw away politeness and act out whatever feeling is in our hearts. **Just be rude** to each other?

**No, here's what you do:** You still choose to act in love, or politely, even when you don't feel like it—but all the while repenting of your hateful, unkind heart, asking God to change it, and pressing more deeply into the mercies of God for you

- **Illus.** I remember early on in my Christian journey really being discouraged by this... *"Good--now you're ready for me to begin to do this in you."*
  - **Here I am now, years later**, still feeling sometimes like I have a lot of hypocrisy in my heart. I live in a posture of repentance before God, constantly asking God to change me, trying to reflect on the fact that I'll never be asked to be more patient with someone than God has been with me; never be asked to forgive anyone of more than God has forgiven me.
- **So, listen: Stop pretending, and start repenting.** We can all see through the politeness veneer anyway. Plus, Jesus can't help you until you expose the wickedness of your heart to him.
  - **Like PJ said here a couple of weeks ago:** Jesus can't help the fake you. A real Jesus died on a real cross for the real you, and it's only when you admit the real you to him—that you've got

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Piper, 148.

a **dead mouse** in there rotting in your heart--that he can help you.

## 2. Our love should be grounded in God's truth (vs. 9)

2nd command: <sup>9</sup> "Detest evil, cling to what is good."

- Love has to be grounded in God's truth **because we recognize that love that is not grounded in God's truth** is ultimately not really love at all.
  - **When you care about someone**, your sense of right and wrong can get thrown off because you just want them to be happy. You have tied your hearts to theirs, and it hurts you for them to be miserable.
  - But have you ever seen a parent who is too weak to discipline their child even when it is necessary? They can't bear the tears and anger of their kids, so they cave giving the kid what they want, even though that is not good for the child. Veronica and I have experienced this numerous times as parents. You know some **punishment is causing your kid distress**, and you hate that, and **they are mad at you**, and you hate that, and you just want them to be happy right now. But you know that if you do that, that is not really loving for them.
  - **I think one of the first times I experienced this** was when I took my first daughter in for a round of vaccination shots when she had turned one. Let me just say to all you pediatricians out there—there needs to be a little prep-work done with the parents on that...
  - The **parent who won't go through with the pains of discipline**, and correction, ultimately doesn't love their kids too much, but too little.
- **The same thing applies to our relationships in the church.** We have to love each other enough to tell the truth, because love that is not based in the truth is ultimately not love at all.
  - **The word "detest" literally means here 'be horrified.'**  
*Recognize evil for the corrupting power that it is. Be **horrified***

by it. **Kids with Mike G.** "We all love Mike..." but stay away from that. We should feel the same way about the corrupting power of sin in someone's life.

- **'Cling' literally means 'glue yourselves inseparably'** to what God calls good because you know there is no good apart from that.
- A love that won't warn against the dangers of evil ultimately isn't love. **When you won't tell the truth to someone**, what is motivating you is not your love for them, but a *selfish desire to be loved!* You are afraid of losing their affection more than you love them; you **love your own comfort** more than you love their ultimate good.

Jesus **loved us enough to tell us the truth** even when it made us so mad we killed him for it. **Love like that.**

## 3. Our love should feel like family (vs. 10)

<sup>10</sup> Love one another deeply as brothers and sisters.

- There's **two interesting Greek words** here in this sentence: Love each other deeply: *philostorge*: Those are two words for love—**phileo** (the word love between friends) and **storge** (the word for affection—it's like saying, "love, love." And do this as brothers and sisters' is (*philadelphia*). Deeply as brothers and sisters.
- The **love at work within the body of Christ** should resemble the love at work in a **nuclear family**. (I know some of us have jacked-up families, so read this through the lens of a healthy family.)
  - In a healthy family, if your sibling develops a problem, you don't give up on them.
  - If your parents become needy in their old age, you don't say, "Well, I just don't have space for this in my life;" no, you rearrange your life to take care of them. Even if that means they move in with you.

- If your kid causes a problem at school, or starts to develop an annoying character trait--you don't call them in and say, "Hey, listen, sorry. It's **just not working out for you** to be here anymore. Security is here to escort you out." You may be tempted to do that, but you don't do it.
- **No, you are devoted to them.** Even with their faults, they're family. He's **not fat**; he's my brother.
- **In a family, the problems** experienced by one family member become the problems of every family member.
  - There is a group of people at this church that are committed to walk through life with me. They take on my problems as their own. If I walked through a time of financial burden, they would bear it with me.
  - And I know they won't give up on me. If I'm rude at this year's Thanksgiving dinner, they'll still invite me back to next year's.
- **This is what the body of Christ should be like.**
- **Honest question:** What would you compare your commitment to the church to?
  - Maybe it's like an intramural soccer team to you. You enjoy it. You give it some of your energy. But it's only one night a week, and it's pretty low on your list of priorities.
  - Or maybe it's like your commitment to the new season of *The Voice*: At the beginning of the season you're into it, but if the singers aren't your favorite, or you don't like the decisions that the judges are making, or you experience the first pangs of boredom, you change the channel.
  - Or **maybe it's like a free trial of some streaming service**. You sign up for your two-week trial, and you actually like some of what you're getting, but you rotate between 8 different email addresses because you don't want to get financially invested.
- **The church should be most like a family.** Where you get committed. Where you lock the door. Where you show up for

family dinner not because you like what's on the menu but because it is family.

- Leaving a church and going to a new one should be a serious, serious decision because you are leaving one family and joining another.
- I'm **not saying there's never a time to do it**, only that you don't flit around between churches like you would between fast-food restaurants based on what you're in the mood for. Wherever God leads you to be in church, it should be like family.

#### 4. Our love should recognize the inherent worth God has placed in every person (vs. 10)

I love this next verse: <sup>10</sup> Outdo one another in showing honor.

- To show honor means to **recognize and acknowledge** the value someone has.<sup>5</sup>
- **Our culture believes in this** --but they only show honor to certain kinds of people. People of great accomplishment.
- The gospel teaches us to **think differently** about people.
  - It teaches us that every person has great value, because every person is someone made in the image of God.
  - Every believer you see walking around here is someone purchased at the highest price ever paid for something--the blood of the Son of God.
  - Every believer you see possesses the Spirit of God and is destined one day to rule with Christ, over the angels!
  - And that may be **hard to see now**, but that's their future.
  - It reminds me of one of my favorite C.S. Lewis passages: "It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature

<sup>5</sup> John Mark Comer, "A Community of Honor in a Culture of Contempt" preached at Bridgetown Church on July 28, 2019.

which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare.”<sup>6</sup>

- **Treat them that way.** Treat every person like a celebrity. Try to outdo one another in showing honor. Trip over each other to show honor.
- **One of the distinctive features of Jesus’ church should** be this. Historian Rodney Starks says it was one of the distinctive features of the early church. It was the place where honor was shown to all.
  - The poor, the immigrants, those from different classes, were all treated with the honor that comes from being a child of God.
  - Stark says that the church was the only place in the whole Roman Empire where people of different ethnicities and classes got along, because they saw each other as brothers and sisters in Christ united by a common problem, a common Savior, a common purpose and a common future.
  - The slave and master were equal.
  - They gave honor and dignity to the unwanted. One of the most fascinating ministries of the early church: baby runs
- We should be a place where groups that get **overlooked by society** are shown great honor as precious creations made in the image of God--whether that is the immigrant or the unborn or the orphaned.
- One of the **most beautiful things** I ever heard a church do--that I’ve always wanted to do here but we just haven’t yet--is they threw a prom for mentally handicapped high school students, those with Down Syndrome, disabilities. It was called “Night to Shine”. Tim Tebow actually hosts it now.
- Here’s why Tim Tebow got involved in this: “At the age of 15, I visited a remote village that had never seen visitors. There I met a boy named Sherwin who would impact my life more than anyone

I have ever met. Sherwin was born with his feet on backwards and was viewed as “cursed” in his village. When the people saw me hold Sherwin, they realized that the good news of Jesus Christ applies to everyone. It was then that my passion grew to help people. That’s why [I do events like Night to Shine.] I want to bring Faith, Hope and Love to those needing a brighter day in their darkest hour of need.”<sup>7</sup>

- Recognizing that many of them will never get to experience a prom, they host it on the church campus and just go all out. Lights and music and food. Everybody dresses up in tuxes; some of the kids come in limousines. And one of the things they did was as each student was coming into the banquet hall, all the student staff and high school students and parents would form a tunnel and they would yell and cheer and clap for that person, and you could just see the joy light up on their faces. And it was so moving, because they were showing honor because of how God saw the person.

This should be a **distinguishing feature** of Jesus’ church:

- I don’t know **everything there is to know about immigration**, and I don’t know all the solutions. But I know that every immigrant is someone made in the image of God and deserves to be honored as such and that Jesus died for every single one.
- I know the **reason that racism and prejudice are evil** is because it refuses to recognize the honor and dignity God has given to someone.
- The **reason abortion is wrong--evil**--is because it fails to recognize that baby, even if unwanted by her parents, is a human being made in the image of God.

It’s **one of the reasons we work so hard at making guests** feel welcome here. From **the moment they drive** onto our property we

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<sup>6</sup> “The Weight of Glory,” pp. 45–46.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.timtebowfoundation.org/about>

want them to understand: **You matter to God** and you are important to us.

And we want to **try and outdo each other** in showing honor. Are you a competitive person? Try competing with others about this.

## 5. Our love should brim with the inherent optimism of God's promises (vs. 11–12)

<sup>11</sup> Do not lack diligence in zeal; be fervent in the Spirit; serve the Lord. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; be persistent in prayer.

- I lump all 6 commands in these verses together in one category, because I think **they all speak about an attitude** we keep in our ministry to one another.
  - Keep in mind, the context of these verses is our love for one another. If you remove these verses from their context, it might look like they are only about our relationship with God.
  - Don't lack diligence in zeal/ fervent in Spirit...
  - **But the context of these things is in how we minister to each other**
- **We should not lack diligence in zeal** when it comes to seeing God do great things in each other's lives. Because **that's what the gospel promises** us.
  - *Be steadfast, unmovable, Paul says, always abounding in the work of the Lord because the resurrection proves your labor is not in vain* (1 Cor 15:58).
  - Our God is a God who brings life back from the dead!
- **We should rejoice in the hope of God's good promises** knowing that he never gives up.
  - *Oh Israel, have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is*

*unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength.*

*Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; 31 but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.*

- **Even when we are afflicted**, we can bear it patiently and optimistically because we know God really is working all things together for good (Rom 8:28); and that what Satan and others might mean for evil, he will overturn for good (Gen 50:20)
- **We can be persistent in prayer because we have a God who hears and answers prayer.**
  - Jesus told us the story of the widow who "kept coming" to the judge's door (Luke 18:7) until her request was answered. And then he told us to be like that. "He told them this story so that we ought always to pray and not to lose heart."
  - **We are to persevere in prayer day and night** until God answers our prayers and changes the heart of the ones that we love.
  - "From everlasting to everlasting the LORD's faithful love is toward those who fear him, and his righteousness extends even toward our children's children (i.e. our grandchildren)!" (Ps 103:17)
  - And I'm not letting God go until he fulfills that.
- **These are the gospel promises on which I stand. And they brim with optimism and so do I.**
  - *I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living!* (Ps 27:13).
  - I will be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord;
  - with my eyes fixed upon God because he is the one who is my refuge and will not let death overtake me (Ps. 141:8)

- So yes, I'm **optimistic** in my ministry here. As **William Carey** said, "The future is as bright as the promises of God!"
- **Well, you say, "What about me?"** The doctor says the illness is not going away. The prognosis is not good." Or, our child is not coming back." Or, "The abuse has happened and I can never erase it from my memory."
  - **You can still have the hopeful confidence** that what others meant for evil God is working for good, and he will not death overtake you.

## 6. Our love should express itself in tangible actions (vs. 13)

<sup>13</sup> Share with the saints in their needs; pursue hospitality.

- I don't have long here, but Paul here indicates our love should not consist of mere words. It must be matched with actions.
- Most scholars, btw, see a **distinction between** sharing with the needs of the saints AND pursuing hospitality--Paul's not just being poetically repetitive, here.
  - That's because in the Bible, "hospitality" typically means a love for the outsider.
  - Taking care of the needs of the saints is how we care for people in the church.
  - Opening our homes in hospitality is how we show love to people outside the church.<sup>8</sup>
- The order is important:
  - Taking care of each other comes first. That's because we're family. There should be **no needy** here. We **should be committed to** each other in such a way that we **bear each other's burdens together**--whether that is a financial burden, a health burden, or a problem with the marriage or the kids. When that happens **others in the church come alongside** to help bear that burden.

- And **that love and commitment to each other** should then spill out into the streets in the form of hospitality: bringing in the outsider.
- I've always loved the words of the **Roman Emperor Julian**, one of the fiercest persecutors of the Christian church, who said in disgust: "[The Christian cause] has been specially advanced through the loving service rendered to strangers... It is a scandal that there is not a single (one) who is a beggar, and that the godless Galileans [i.e. Christians] care not only for their own poor but for ours as well; while those who belong to us look in vain for the help that we should render them."

## MUSIC

So there it is: **6 ways we should love each other**. Our love should...

- be without hypocrisy
- be grounded in God's truth
- feel like family
- recognize the inherent worth God has placed in every person
- brim with the inherent optimism of God's promises
- and, express itself in tangible actions

Isn't this the **kind of community that you want to be a part of?** Isn't this the kind of community the world **yearns for?**

Is **that your relationship** to this church? A bunch of you all are just consumers; your relationship to us is like your relationship to your intramural soccer team.

It's time to join as family. And what does that look like? Here's the basics:

<sup>8</sup> See Rosaria Butterfield, *The Gospel Comes with a Housekey*, p. 35.

- **You should join.** Have you done that? “I’m committed, I just haven’t joined.” You’re like a common law member. There’s a reason making the covenant is important, just like in marriage!
- Are you connected? (small group/volunteering)
- Are you engaging in the lives of others in such a way that you know their needs, they know yours, and you show up for each other?

*It’s time to act on this. Your CP at the end will tell you **how** you can.* If all else fails, go to **STARTING POINT**. That’s why we call it that.

## Invitation

**Now, that’s a lot of “shoulds.”** You *should* love like this; you *should* be like that.

**So don’t miss that Paul connects** all these “should’s” to being renewed in--saturated with--the gospel.

Therefore, in light of the mercies of God, you can be transformed into these kinds of people.

- Y’all, it’s **not accidental that Paul waited 12 chapters** to get to these applications.
- **It’s only through faith in what God has done that we are** empowered in what we ought to do.
- **It’s like we say:** The fire to do in the Christian life comes from being soaked in the fuel of what has *been done*.
- The only way to love like this is to see yourself a recipient of great love!
  - **1 John 4:19:** *We love because...*
  - Rooting yourself in the love of God for you is how love for God and others grows in you, and he only way to grow in your love for others is to grow in your awareness of the love of God for you.

You see, it **all goes back to the gospel**.

- It’s like Martin Luther says, “To progress in the Christian life is always to begin again.”
- Have you begun there?

The gospel is the root from which all the virtues of the Christian life grow.

