

**“LET LOVE BE GENUINE.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church**

**September 14, 2025, 10:30 AM**

**Scripture Texts: Romans 12:9-13**

**Prayer:**

Holy Father, since our salvation depends on our understanding and believing your Holy Word, help us now. Free us from all worldly concerns and affairs that we may understand your Word and love it and live it, by your Spirit in Jesus name. Amen.

**Introduction.**

We just spent five weeks discussing our different spiritual gifts. Gifts given to each Christian by the Holy Spirit for serving the body for the common good of all and for the glory of God. Now Paul speaks to us about how we are to get along together while serving. How should we relate, how should we behave? What does Christlikeness look like in the midst of Spirit-giftedness?

The rest of chapter twelve is like running into a buzz saw. Remember what I said when we started chapter twelve about the difference between the indicative mood and the imperative mood in grammar. The indicative mood states a fact, it says this is true. The imperative says this must be done.

Romans 1-11 were almost entirely in the indicative mood, telling us truth about what God has said and done, Paul gave us the Gospel. Romans 12-15 tells us what we must now do in response to what God has done. God's done is the fuel for our doing. The fire for doing the Christian life comes from being soaked in the lighter fluid of what God has already done.

Romans 12:1 started with “Therefore, in light of the mercies of God, now present your bodies as a living sacrifice.” And this is what that looks like in spades.

25 authoritative imperatives, rapid fire, one after another. Like when mom and dad leave the kids with a babysitter.

No fighting, no hitting, no disobeying, no disrespecting the babysitter, do whatever she says.

No dessert unless you eat all your meal. You can watch one show before bed.

25 applications. The problem with all these exhortations is they are not too hard to understand. They are too plain, clear, straightforward, understandable. We would rather they were hard to figure out so we could have an excuse for not obeying them.

This is not a list of rules. This is a description of Christian character. I was recently asked to write a character reference for a person applying for a job. If someone was writing one for you, this is a list of things they should write about you as a Christian.

When we love God, when we are changed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ, when we are filled with the Holy Spirit, this is what it looks like. This is what life looks like when Christ has become the foundation and summation of all your hopes. We do this because of what He has done.

These should be read slowly, thoughtfully, prayerfully. Seriously meditate on and pray over these verses these next few weeks. Read them at your dinner table each night, talk about them, read them in your own private devotions. Read different translations. Soak in this in September.

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

**Let love be without hypocrisy.**

Paul's very first exhortation is love, the foundational exhortation of the Christian life. Love. This is that word agape which means selfless, unconditional, without reservation, in thoughts, words, attitudes and actions. Like God's love toward us.

But Paul adds a second word to say what kind of love our love is to be. Genuine. Well, that's OK, but it really covers up the actual Greek word.

The Greek word the ESV translates genuine is actually hypocritos, from which we get hypocrisy. This word comes from the Greek theater for an actor wearing a mask, covering up their true identity. When actors act they aren't being real or genuine, they are being someone else, masking their true feelings or thoughts.

The exhortation is to a particular kind of love, it must be without hypocrisy, not counterfeit, but the real thing, authentic, genuine.

Why is Paul saying this to the Christians in the church in Rome? Because that is a problem in the church, then and now. Our love is hypocritical. We deceive in our love, saying one thing, and feeling another. We deceive ourselves into thinking our love is genuine when it is not.

We all have a counterfeit kind of love that we don't actually possess. We try to persuade others and ourselves we love those whom we actually don't love, or treat with neglect or reject all together.

Paul says our love should be different. It should be love all the way down to our heart, not just our lips, not just a veneer of politeness. The Bible doesn't stroke our ego, it goes for our heart.

Paul is saying strive to have your words and attitudes match what is in your heart. Don't try to look better on the outside than you are on the inside. Make sure when you say you love someone that you actually mean it.

Who are you really? Who do people think you are? Do we spend much of our life not being ourselves, but play acting? Do we struggle being real in our love? The truth is we are all hypocrites, in the world and in the church.

Do you think the fact that I am preaching this means I am not a hypocrite and I am pointing the finger at all of you? I have news for you. I am stuck having to preach this knowing I am a hypocrite in my love. I act like I love everyone, when I don't.

Let's face it, there are people we don't like, people we can't stand, people who annoy us, people who talk too much or about things we don't care about, people we don't want to listen to.

How can love be without hypocrisy when people annoy you, hurt you, and some of them you just don't like that much?

Well one option is when you feel like your love has hypocrisy in it to just take off the mask and throw away politeness and act out whatever feeling is in our hearts and just be rude to each other. Well, that would not be hypocrisy, but it would be worse than hypocrisy, it would be ungodly and unChristlike.

The other option is to take God's imperative to heart and choose to act in love, to be kind and polite, even when you don't feel like it, and while you are doing that you are also inwardly repenting of your hateful, unkind heart, asking God to change it, and pressing more deeply into the mercies of God for you. You can only love like this because God first loved you.

You do this in the power of the Gospel knowing how much you are loved by God when you were completely unlovable. You do this knowing how much you have been forgiven by God.

Those who have been overwhelmed by the debt of their sin and the love of God are changed. They are real, they have compassion and kindness.

**Ephesians 4:32** Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

What does loving someone you don't like look like? Loving him in a way that he senses you are being honest with him and that you genuinely care for him.

Where does this kind of love come from? It is that kind of love that is humanly impossible without the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit. It comes from God and it is only possible by God's Spirit at work in us, changing our cold, dark, stony hearts.

We have to tell God the truth, my love is weak, faint, cold, selfish. I have failed and I have hurt others, especially those I should love the most.

Pray I Corinthians 13 and ask God to make that true in your heart.

**I Corinthians 13:4-8** Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.

Let me give you a powerful illustration of someone's experience with hypocritical love and then with genuine, sincere, real love. Not perfect, but genuine, sincere, real.

### ***Testimony of Mary Laird.***

Mary Laird asked me to read her profession of faith she shared with the elders last week.

I was born into a broken family that was unable to care for me. I was removed from them and was placed with my aunt, uncle, and my cousin. My aunt and uncle were unable to care for me, so I was adopted by a single mom who already had a son. After some time, [she] I was sent to a therapeutic foster home.

One day I was told that I had a new family. I was adopted by Jeff and Renee Laird on October 18, 2019. That day was a special day because I finally had a real home, a mom and dad who loved me and a brother I could look up to. Plus, God blessed me with my Grandma Lorna TeVelde whom I enjoy picking berries with and my

Grandpa Brad TeVelde who shares my love of horse riding and music. God also blessed me with my Grandma Candi Laird who taught me about sewing and embroidering, and my Grandpa Galen Laird who taught me almost everything I know about yard work. I am so thankful that God put my grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins in my life. But I am most thankful for my mom and dad.

When I first came to be a part of the Laird family, I was a disaster. I had a very traumatic earlier childhood and because of that I was a very hard kid to parent. I felt like I couldn't trust anyone, which made me push away those who loved me and wanted to help me. My mom was always there. She was the one who tried to calm me down in tense situations. I remember screaming and thrashing for hours almost every day. I was so scared to be loved for fear that I would be given away again. My parents got a hard beating physically and emotionally. But they were still strong in my weakest, darkest, and scariest moments. After about three years I finally began to settle on the fact that I was actually a part of my family. I realized that I was loved even through the hard times, and that I wasn't going to be given up ever again. But I still felt something missing. I always wanted to be in control of what happened at every moment. But now I can see that God used that weakness of mine to point me to Him.

One example comes clearly to mind. My brother, Jarred, was in a terrible car accident. He spent his birthday in the hospital. Once he was released from the hospital he went to Oregon to be with his biological family. Jarred was also adopted and obviously hadn't dealt with all the trauma that his biological family and early childhood had caused him. Jarred didn't get along well with his father and he didn't like the things his mother made him do. So, he came back home for Christmas. And even with all the threats he told us before he went to Oregon, we gave him a second chance. After Christmas he decided he didn't want anything to do with us. We gave him chance after chance, but he didn't take any of them. My mom was trying so hard to stay strong and help Jarred but my mom went through a lot of pain having to deal with the fact that her son didn't want her as his own mother. My dad was also trying to cope and help my brother out but the thought of losing his only son was almost unbearable. I was also in a lot of pain too. I had lost the brother that I thought I could look up to. I felt so empty inside. That is when God told me it was time to stop trying to live life on my own with my own strength.

But I didn't really listen to this advice until one of my friends invited me to go to a concert with them. Anne Wilson was performing, and she talked about losing her brother in a tragic car accident. She said that she had been a Christian all her life

and was raised by a God-fearing family. But when her brother, Jacob, died she spoke of God using her pain and grief and making it into something so powerful and beautiful. Anne said that her brother and God inspired her to write and sing songs of praise to the Lord.

After Anne Wilson's concert I felt so full of life and like I had everything I needed. I knew then that if I wanted to be truly happy and content, that I would need God. It was that night that I asked God to forgive my sins and be my Lord and Savior. And every day since then I feel his presence around me. Looking back on my life, I see a puzzle being put together by the loving hands of God. I also see a huge pile of pieces waiting to be added to that puzzle. Now I am not scared of what those pieces will look like once they are put together. Instead, I am excited for them. But I am most excited for that last puzzle piece to be put in place because I now know and believe that I will spend eternity with my Lord and Savior in Heaven.

Beauty from ashes, light from darkness. When she experienced real love, it took her a long time to trust it, which is understandable. But the beauty is Jeff and Renee and the grandparents were unwavering. The more Mary pushed away, the more they pulled her to them.

That is an incredible statement of faith. It says there is something good, something of value, something worthy of time and attention, something beautiful in every person. And of course there is, we are all made in the image of God, and as Christians we all have the Holy Spirit in us.

Can you love people who are weak, broken, depressed, sinful? Can you find good and beauty?

Find good things in people you don't like. Don't be stingy with your words of love. The more you say I love you, the more your heart will follow your words.

Let your love be genuine, authentic, without hypocrisy, unconditional, sacrificial, from the heart, like God's love for us.

**I Peter 4:8** Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.