

Romans

"A Life of Love"

Romans 12:9-16"

We're going to read from Romans 12: 9-16 and before we do, I need to say this. There is not a single passage in the entire Bible, that's quite like it. Specifically from chapter 12 verses 9 to 16, *there are 21 commands in a row, 21 in a row.* No explanation, no motivation, no grounding in the work of Christ. Just one command after another. Very short span. And some people love that. Just tell me what to do. They say that's what it means to be Christian. Do what God wants. And other people cringe at a list like that. It makes him feel guilty. And they perhaps ask, aren't we supposed to do everything as grounded by God's grace? So what we're going to do is, is set up the passage for about five minutes. Just explain why it looks the way it does. and I'm going to read it first, and I'm going to read it last. I'm going to read it at the end of the service the second time, so be prepared to stand up. But I am going to ask you to stand because this is the work, the word of the Lord, Lord of the sovereign Lord. And that describes the work of Christ. So please stand, if you would, for the reading of God's Word. And we'll do the same thing at the end. This is the Apostle Paul applying the gospel to us. He says...

...let love be genuine, abhor or hate or detest what is evil. Hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection and outdo or run before each other in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal. Be fervent in spirit. Serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope. Be patient in tribulation. Be constant in prayer. Contribute to or serve or take care of the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Don't be haughty but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own eyes.

Let's pray one more time.

Heavenly father, give us we pray ears to hear what you're saying to us, how you're commanding us, and how it hangs together with all that you are and all that you do in us and for us. We pray in Jesus name. Amen.

So 21 commands in a row, and I'm just going to guess that at least 1 or 2 people here counted to see if they thought I was right. Some accounting say it's 20, but I think it's 21. Most people do 21 commands in a row with no grounding. But the truth is, the grounding is found in chapters 3 through 11 of Romans. You remember chapters one and two and part of chapter three describe human sinfulness and rebellion and our merit of God's judgment. But then in chapter three, it describes the work of Christ, who offered himself as a sacrifice of propitiation for sin, so that we're justified in his sight. If we confess our sins, he's faithful. He'll forgive us, and nothing can

separate us from his love. Although we sin with our hands and our feet and our mouth and our heart, God's love comes over us. And if you will allow me to show you, I believe this passage is held together by the theme of God's love and the love that we show as a consequence.

So if you look for love in the book of Romans earlier, the focus is on God's love for us. And now the focus is on the way we show God's love to others. In chapter five, Paul said, God proves or demonstrates his own love for us in this, that while we were sinners, Christ died for us. And if he died for us when we were his enemies, then we should love our enemies, and we should bless those who persecute us and love each other sincerely.

And God's love has been poured into our hearts. Chapter five says through the Holy Spirit. So because we have love in our hearts, we can love and love truly. And chapter eight says, nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. And this motivates us to love each other. So we have is not just a string of commandments, although it looks like that at first.

There is a theme in that theme is love. I'm going to go very slowly for verses nine and ten, and the very first command is let love be genuine, let love be sincere. It can be translated literally. Let love not be hypocritical. Then a little bit later in verse ten, it says love one another with brotherly affection, that is to say, with your emotions.

And down in verse 13 when it says practice or show hospitality. The word for hospitality in Greek is **phyllo Xenia**. Now, a lot of you know that Philia is a word for love, and it's the word for love that is affectionate toward people we like sort of people we admire. And Xenia means a stranger.

So literally it's saying love sincerely, love with brotherly love and also love strangers. And at the end when it says, bless those who persecute you, he's really saying, love those who hate you. So love is the unifying theme. And if the commands have love 3 or 4 times, and so many of the other commands tell us how to love blessed people, take time to consider how to speak words of blessing and empathize with people.

Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. That means you enter into their life imaginatively, entering the experiences they've had. So it's all very affectionate and sincere. That would also says, we hate evil. We'll talk about that. But you also compete. Surely this is a form of love. We compete. We run as fast as we can to outdo each other and showing honor and respect to each other.

We burn for zeal with God and God's cause. Now, this is a very emotional passage if you think about it a little bit. And in fact, Paul talks about our emotions a lot over in Galatians chapter five. There's a description of the deeds of the flesh, and the deeds of the flesh are emotional hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage and envy.

And a little bit later, Galatians 5 describes the fruit of the spirit. And again, they're very emotional in nature, love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, gentleness. And so we don't simply have a command here. We have a way of, of living, but also a way of feeling. Sometimes Christians, when they make a mistake, tell themselves, you know, don't be so emotional, don't be so upset.

But the problem is not that we have emotions, it's that they go awry. We care about the wrong things. We care about them too much. Anybody here know that Alabama's wonderful basketball team suffered a pretty painful defeat yesterday? It wasn't fun to watch. Did you get emotional about it? You might say to yourself, don't be so emotional, but. But the Bible is not against emotions. The Bible wants us to be angry. Sometimes it says hate evil, but you have to hate the right things, not trivial things. In fact, Solomon says in one place there is a time to love and a time to hate.

Should we hate? The answer is yes. Of course. We should hate terrible cruelties toward children. We should hate wars that have no reason. We should hate autocrats who marched their armies into the lands of innocent, peaceable people. Yes, there are things to hate, and there is a time to love. Now the commandments start kind of easily. It says love genuinely.

It says in verse ten, love with brotherly affection. Love your friends, love your family. That's what it means. But then a little bit later it says, love a stranger, that's harder. And then it says, bless those who persecute you. That is, love your enemy. That's harder still. But the big idea is genuine love, and that's the very first commandment let love be genuine.

Let love be true. But before I get to that, I would say one more thing. And that is this passage, which, to be honest, it's such a challenging passage. I read it any number of times in the ESV and other translations, and several times in the Greek, and about the third time I read the Greek, I noticed how poetic it is, and if I can just read it to you with the poetry in mind, it says this in one space, in the spirit, burning in the Lord, serving in hope, rejoicing in affliction, adore, enduring in prayer, persevering in the needs of the saints, sharing.

So what we have here as a as a whole, is a passage that moves us from the love God shows to us in Romans three four, five, six, seven, and eight, to the love we show as a response and the first way we love is by loving sincerely. What that means is the church and the family and the workplace are on a stage.

The goal is not to pretend to love each other. And let's be honest, maybe especially in the oh so very polite South, it's possible to put on a show of love and affection by, saying flattering words even to somebody you don't like. It's possible. Or to be polite to people when in fact you're seething with anger at them.

Let love be sincere. If you say a word of kindness, mean the word of kindness. To put it differently, we have a terrible example of insincere love in Judas, who betrayed Jesus with a kiss with a sign of affection. He handed him over to his adversaries to be slain. Let love be sincere. When people ask me from elsewhere about my life here among you, living in Birmingham and Briarwood, one of the first things I say is that this is a loving community. The people here are kind, they're affectionate, they're warm, and I simply want to say, keep it up. If God's been poured in your hearts, let it show. Let it show in real deeds.

I was reading of all things, a work on art history a while ago, and I came upon the story of a man named Jean Bazille. He is the least famous of all the Impressionists. His close friends included [Claude Monet](#), [Alfred Sisley](#) and [Édouard Manet](#) and others that we've all heard of. Who was Bazille? Well, Bazille was the man who took care of his friends. I mean, you can find his work in museums, but it's not celebrated the way other work is. He was the only man who had the wealth to support the group, because at the time, the way to become prosperous or to make a living by being an artist was to enter into contests judged by formal parties like the Salon of Paris and the Salon of Paris, did not like the Impressionists, and so they never won any prizes, so they couldn't sell their artwork for any money. And they were always poor. But Bazille was born to wealth, and he purchased or rented a large space, a large working space, and purchased canvases and paints and brushes and let all of his friends, his poor friends, use them. So Monet and Manet and the and all the rest were using his stuff. And when Monet completely ran out of money, Bazille, who was still in his 20s, purchased one of those Monet works for the price he thought was fair. Now, one reason why you never heard of Bazille is that he was a patriot. He was a French patriot, and a war broke out in 1870 between France and Russia, and Bazille volunteered. Although he didn't need to, and his captain was killed in a ferocious conflict, and he picked up the flag and himself died within a few minutes. Now, when his friends found out what happened, they looked at one of his paintings. He had painted, a scene with all of his friends around him, and he had not put himself in the scene at all, perhaps because he thought of himself as the least of the group, and Manet erased what was there in the middle, and painted Bazille into the middle of the painting with all of his friends.

Now that, my friends, is love that's sincere love that's doing something to show love in the way that makes sense to those who knew Bazille.

So we're not trying to be polite. We're not trying to give out little handshakes and little hugs and smiles to project love. We actually want to love each other. We want to love each other here in this community. We want to love each other at work. We want to love each other and our families. Now, even the most flawed marriage has love in it and even the happiest marriage has little problems. So, for example, you might have a desire, even if you have very happy marriage, to manage your spouse a little bit, to get your husband or wife to behave a little bit better. I

don't know about you, but I think my wife puts the dishes into the dishwasher very loudly, and I think she takes them out of the dishwasher even more loudly. And so I plead with her to let me take the dishes gently out of the dishwasher. And I won't say who it is, but it might be that one of us, or both of us, makes unwanted noises in the middle of the night. And, you know, you could make you could wake up your spouse and edge them and bump them and say, would you please stop snoring? Or you could get an earplug and put it in your ears and get ones that cost more than one penny that actually do some work for you and you. It is easy to want to manage your spouse, the dishwasher, and the ears and the floors and the clothes and all that sort of thing. And to fix your spouse and to make things function well. But the Bible says love one another sincerely. Don't just manage each other. Let love be genuine.

Paul says that includes thinking carefully about the way you bless people. Paul says a little bit later, bless those who persecute, do not curse them. And a little bit later he talks also about blessing that takes thought. That's an act of love.

Now, it just so happens that today, after this service, we're going to honor our pastor, Benny Youngblood, by moving him up to the status of Associate Pastor. But I'd thought of this before I knew this was his day, because I've been around some pastors who are really good at identifying people's gifts and blessing them for it. It's an act of love. One of them who doesn't live around here is named Lance Hudgens. He was so good at identifying what people were good, and he would bless them, not to flatter them or build them up or make them egotistical, but he would do it in a way that made people say, Praise God for the good he's done in you. And that's Benny Youngblood. Benny looks around and he watches and he observes. Get near him and, you know, before long he's going to identify what's good and beautiful -- what God has put into your life. And then he'll tell you about it in a way that makes sense. That's an act of love. So bless the people around you. Take some time today to label in your mind the beauty of someone around you, and tell them about it with careful, kind words. Because the truth of the matter is when Paul says, bless, do not curse. We've all been cursed. Maybe by our mothers and fathers, maybe by grandparents, maybe by a boss, maybe by a coach or a teacher who said you're good for nothing. You're so selfish, you ruin everything. Won't you ever learn? Why are you so weak? You're a liar. You're a bully. You're a coward. Maybe it's born of anger. Maybe it's born of envy. Who knows? We receive a lot of curses in this life. And so let us love one another by blessing each other. Now, one way we bless each other, even when we could curse each other, is by remembering who Jesus is and what he did. Because, you know, Jesus bore the curses we deserved for sin, for our misdeeds.

And God most certainly could have said to us, away from me, you evildoers! But Jesus bore the curse. Therefore let us silence the cursing that we might have within ourselves, and instead live a life of love. As Paul says elsewhere, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us by

speaking words of blessing, thoughtful and sincere to each other, we're going to sing how deep the father's love for us, how vast beyond all treasure.

It's such a beautiful thing. Now, I told you I was going to get to Francis Turton, who is an obscure theologian from almost 450 years ago. But he wrote, something is going to be on the screen here just in a minute about the love of God is what he said. There it is. He wanted to label God's love.

He said, first of all, there is a love of benevolence in which God will raise the good. He willed good to the creature from all eternity. And then there is the love of beneficence, in which he does good to the creature in time according to his good will. And then third, there is a love of complacency in which he delights that this is he's not he's not doing anything.

He's not giving anything that promising anything. He delights in his creature on account of the rays of his image seen in them. So when the love of benevolence, God loves us before we are in the love of beneficence, he loves us as we are, and in the love of complacency. He loves us when and where we are. It's easy to illustrate this through love of children and grandchildren, which I suppose I've done many times, but I'm going to do it the other way and talk about the way a child can bless parents or grandparents, because, you know, the love of complacency, which turns and rightly says God has for us, is love of simply looking at somebody and saying, I appreciate what you mean to me. And I delight in simply being with you. You know, the little children have their affections and they switch from time to time. And when my oldest granddaughter was four years old, she went through a period when she simply wanted to be by my hip and with me every minute she possibly could.

Where I went, she followed, and one day she looked up to me and said, Papa, wherever you are, that's where I want to be. Now she doesn't remember that. Unfortunately. But she did say it, and I remember it. She was basically saying, I'm just glad to be with you. And God is simply glad to be with us, his children, whom he loves with an everlasting love.

Now love is also, besides being genuine, is also informed the command says love sincerely. We're going to go back to our verses here, verse nine and ten. Thank you very much. Love, sincerely or genuinely abhor or hate what is evil? Can hatred of evil be a form of love? Absolutely. The Bible tells us we should test all things and hold fast to what is good.

So hold fast to what is good and understand that God doesn't think everything is good. In fact, over in Proverbs 6, Solomon says, there are some things that God hates. Here they are. The Lord hates a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, hearts that devise evil schemes, and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers. Those are detestable things.

It is. It is right to hate such things. Parents have a proper love of people who harm their children. We are there, I say. We hate it when a bad boy or girl becomes the friend of our child.

We don't hate the child, of course. Absolutely. And we hate it when somebody who's unworthy of our child starts to show a lot of attention to them, maybe romantic attention.

We hate it when a teacher or a or a coach or a boss is cruel. We hate it when someone is cruel at work, to our spouse or a neighbor is mean to our spouse. We don't hate the person. Of course we love our enemies. But there is a there is a place for hating what people do. So love is informed by proper forms of hate.

It is also devoted and it is affectionate. Verse ten says, love one another with brotherly love. Now I don't know about you, but when I was a new Christian, I heard the greatest form of love in the world is God's agape love. You've probably heard that. Now, I don't entirely disagree with it, but I want to qualify it a little bit.

The most amazing love is God's love for sinners. The most amazing love is God's love for his enemies and people who are so deeply unlovable. That is truly astonishing and contrary to all human experience. But I'm not sure it's the highest form of love, because that's dispassionate. And when we love an enemy, it's unfeeling. It's contrary to feeling.

But this passage says love one another with affection. Then the Greek word last time I'll use the Greek today, I promise. The Greek word is *philia*, from which we might recognize fill us *philia* friendship. And that's the person that we love. Because we find them attractive. We agree on the same causes we like the same music, we care deeply about the same things.

And so we're attracted to somebody. And *philia* is a word that describes love within the family, the love that makes people want to hug each other. Husband and wife, parent and child, friend and friend. So Paul is saying, love one another affectionately. That's a good form of love. We should let that flow. Not only do we have that love for each other, we have.

A love that wants to outdo each other in showing honor. Now, sometimes it's possible for us to want to receive honor for the good things we do. In fact, I've been practicing taking the dishes out of the dishwasher very quietly, and I have hoped that someone would compliment me and say to me, Dan, you take the dishes out of the dishwasher more quietly than anyone I know.

This has not yet happened, and I suspect it never will happen. And in fact, it would be kind of strange if anybody didn't compliment me for that. But, you know, when I'm driving at, we want to be noticed. And Paul says, that's not the point. The point is not that you be noticed. The point is that you notice.

And how do one another run ahead of each other to try to label the kindness, the attentiveness, the willingness to overlook a small hurt that we can see in the people around us. It's not flattery. We're saying, I thank God for the good he's done in you, but I want to label the good he's done in you.

So stop thinking about the attention we might get for ourselves resentment, jealousy, and so forth. Now, love is not only a private matter, which I've been focusing on for the last few minutes. It can also be very public. And while preparing for the sermon, I read the story of a man named James Harrison who essentially donated blood 20 times a year for 60 years.

Now, when he died, which he did just a few weeks ago, that's why I read the story. When he died, people hailed him as a hero. He lived in Australia and he donated blood 1173 times. He became a plasma donor, above all because his blood has something in it called or had something in it called antidote. An antidote is a fairly rare, I don't know, entity in the blood that people who have, a difficulty in pregnancy known as the rhesus disease, when the mom has RH positive blood in the unborn child, RH negative, or vice versa.

And there's danger that can be illness or can possibly be death. And he's one of only about 200 people in Australia who has anted. And so he kept on donating and donating. And after 50 years, they started to look upon him as a hero and try to recognize him. He said, I'm not a hero. I sit in a chair and I eat a cookie and I have some coffee and I'm on my way.

In 15 minutes. There's nothing heroic about what I'm doing, but there is a story behind it, and the story behind it is that when he was 14, he contracted a very serious illness, and doctors had to remove one of his lungs. And during the time he's in the hospital, he received two gallons of blood. And when he was 14, he vowed that when he was 18, which is the official age in Australia for donating blood, he would begin to donate blood.

And he kept it up ever since. Even more, when he discovered that he had anti D in his blood and even more, two of his own grandchildren needed his plasma for an antibody and are healthy today. As a result. Now most of the people who cared for tens of thousands never knew him at all, and he never knew them.

You can also love people at your work. I was reading a little while ago about, the element tantalum #71 on your periodic chart. It's a rare earth metals found in any level of abundance at all. And only three countries in the world Democratic Republic of Congo, Brazil and Australia. And as it happens, tantalum is in your possession almost certainly today.

Not much, just a little for those capacitors and transistors in your cell phone. Almost every cell phone has tantalum and there's not much of it. And when the cell phones exploded, they had to find tantalum. And in the Democratic Republic of Congo alone, it's right there on the surface. And little mud like deposits in, a compound called candlelight and some others that I won't bother to name.

In the 1990s, farmers could go out and just shovel it out of their fields and earn enough money to get a year's wages in one day. And so they were shoveling tantalum. The only problem is a Democratic Republic of Congo location for the tantalum is right by the war that was going on

the edge of the country between the Hutus and Tutsis, and people realized that they were using the farmers were using this money to buy weapons by which they were killing each other.

And believe it or not, the world's economic leaders, the people in charge of making cell phones, said, we're not buying from the Democratic Republic of Congo anymore. It's killing people. We're going to buy it from Brazil and from Australia, where it's harder to get, but we can still get it and we're not going to profit. We're not going to lower costs at the price of people killing each other with weapons they use by buying our materials.

That's love. That's love. And Paul also says in verse 11 that love is fervent. It says in our translation, don't be slothful in zeal. Be fervent in spirit as you serve the Lord. Now, I don't know about you, but some people, Presbyterians, are prone to this. Get a little bit worried about other groups of Christians. You know, those Pentecostals.

We look at them with a Sinai, a little too enthusiastic about things. And the truth of the matter is, people that are reserved can feel like slugs or toads or frogs just emerging from the mud after the long winter. And we don't like that feeling. But the truth of matter is the Bible does tell us. Paul says, be fervent in spirit as you serve the Lord, not boasting about your fervency.

But if you're fervent in spirit, be fervent in spirit. We're also rejoicing in hope, are joyful in hope, and we're patient in tribulation. We keep on praying. Of course, it's true that hardships can shake us, but Paul says, don't let that happen. Pray instead. Psalm 37 says, we stumble, but we do not fall in times of affliction. As we turn to God for help.

Now, as you hear these commandments, it's very tempting to say too much, too many commandments. I can't do all these things, in which case I say, well, be constant in prayer and say what the Lord gives us to say. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God. If you say these commandments are too much, then tell the Lord I'm not up to it, and ask him not to simply allow you to acquiesce in your sinfulness, but rather to turn to him for grace.

Love is also realistic. It tells us in verse 13 that true love contributes to, or takes care of, or shares in, or meets the needs of the saints, and it seeks to show hospitality. We meet the needs of the people we see, and that often includes loving the stranger, showing hospitality. Now, there's a reason for saying that in New Testament times there were very few safe hotels or motels as we understand them.

Instead, the ends of the Roman Empire were often dirty physically and unsafe places and places of immorality. And so Christians were supposed to take care of each other, give each other a good place to stay if they traveled bearing the gospel with them, or just doing their business.

Show love to strangers. That's what hospitality is. I don't know how you view the experience of having someone in your home. A lot of us begin with the idea that we need to entertain, that

our house has to be clean, that all the silverware and the dishes need to be just so. And there can't be any dust bunnies in any corner.

So if we have anybody over and so we don't have, we don't bring people over because there's too much work. But there's a difference between hospitality and entertainment, hospitality, just letting somebody come to your house and stay there, if I may say a kind word about my wife. And a couple of you have heard this before. When our children were in college, we conveyed to them the idea that if they have a friend and that friend doesn't have anywhere to go, they can come in our house.

And that could be, you know, July 4th or Thanksgiving if they're far from home. And it's a way to variety of people in our home over the years. And we slowly got more and more at ease saying, hey, all we have is leftovers today and we have a bed, and the sheets might be kind of ripped or something.

If there's several people to house at once, it's all fine. And I realized how far we had gone, when one day we had a man in our house named Elliot, and Elliot was a dear friend of one of our children and, also known to another of our children. And he had experienced a terrible hardship, and he was laid low for understandable reasons.

And our daughters said, come, just come to our house, come to our house. And one day he was not only having a meal with us, he lived 100 miles away. He was going to spend the night with us and, Debbie said to Elliot, listen, you don't mind making your own bed, do you? The sheets are at the top of the stairs.

Go up to the top of the stairs. Turn left. There is a closet there immediately to your left, and when you in the door, turn left again and you'll see the closet is full of the sheets and the towels that you need. And Elliot happened to be there to see this, looked at my wife and said, you don't know how many times I've been at your house, do you? I know where everything is. Here. And I started counting the number of times and it made sense. We love strangers and they've become friends and we bless.

We bless those who are our enemies. As verse 14 says, we bless them. Even if they persecute, we don't curse them. As we said a moment ago, we don't repay evil for evil. The Bible says we love even when it's hard.

We love our enemies and pray for those who misuse us. Jesus said in Matthew chapter five we stop the cycle of insults, encounter insults. That's what we need in the world today. Don't we grieve over the Bosnians and the Serbs and the Shiites and the Sunnis and the Israelis and the Jews? Lord, would you bring this to an end?

Would people stop repaying evil for evil? Don't we know that Christ himself blessed his enemies from the cross and pleaded with the father to forgive them? Can we not win people over with kindness? We can. And that leads to even one more emotional side of love. And that is it invites us. Paul commands us and therefore wills us to rejoice with those who rejoice even when we're low.

Can you rejoice with those monsters from Duke? Is it possible? Who killed our beloved people? Now I'm meddling, right? Rejoice! For those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. You may say, I couldn't care less about college basketball. Please stop talking about basketball. But there are people who are sad and we can empathize with them. Feel what other people feel. That's what the passage is asking. Sympathize with people as Jesus sympathizes with us.

But he doesn't just sympathize, right? He empathizes with us in our weakness, but he also is also strong to defeat our foes. That's what we really need. That's what we gain from Christ. But we can at least weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice. Then there's verse 16. Verse 16 tells us, live in harmony with one another, and associate with the lowly.

Living with harmony with one another is pretty simple. We've kind of covered it. Don't curse, bless, locate what's good in each other. Don't manipulate each other. What about what about associating with the lonely? Let me put a test question to you. you know that depending on how the people counted out, Birmingham has maybe 1.2 or 1 point 3 or 1.5 million people in the greater area.

It's a lot of people. That's a fair number of people. Do you ever walk, go around town and bump into people you know, all the time and say, you know, it's such a small world. I just keep seeing my people. That never happened to you. Well, if it does, let me suggest you do. You don't know enough people because if you're truly freely moving them out with 1.4 million people, you should see a lot of people you don't know.

And maybe you're just hanging out with your own people and don't want to be with anybody else. Anyone who's different now, one more time, I say this is a hard, hard body of commands and it does lead us to the gospel. But instead of walking you through it bit by bit, I'm going to ask you to enter with me.

Instead of me telling you how Jesus fulfills everything that's in this passage, because he does in the end. In the end, it's clear that this passage which tells us what to do actually shows us what Christ does. His love, for example, is genuine. His love is affectionate. He blesses those who curse, and I can walk all the way through it, but instead I want you to stand with me as I read the passage by which I mean stand with me.

I invite you to stand with me as I read the passage, and I want you to think as I read it in a slightly different translation, I want you to think about the way in which you know that Christ

loves you and Christ loves us, and Jesus loves the world according to these words. Hear them again as a description of our Lord.

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor serving the Lord. Be joyful and hope patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you.

Bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice. Mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position.

Let's pray together.

Heavenly father, how we thank you that you associated with us people of low position by the incarnation. Lord, when people sinned against you, you blessed them and you have blessed us. When we deserve your judgment. Lord, we know your love is sincere, and we know that in the best possible way. You hate evil and you love us with fullness of affection, and you honor us by calling us sons and daughters. Or do you never lacked in zeal? You always served the father. So, Lord, for these things we thank you. We thank you for your hospitality in calling us who were strangers and far away from you, our beloved, your beloved friends. And so bless us and keep us. We pray in Jesus name, Amen.