**Genuinely love one another**

Text: Romans 12:9-10,16

Rev. David Waldron

**Scriptures:** John 13:34-35; Genesis 13:8-11; Luke 2:41-52; Romans 12:9-16

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 243, 51b, 386, 517, ‘The power of the cross’, 524

**Series:** The ‘one anothers’ of Scripture (#13)

**Theme:** The Apostle Paul writes to the Roman Christians about responding to the grace of God in Christ with genuine love for other believers, explaining that this love is expressed through brotherly affection, outdoing one another in showing honour and in living harmoniously together.

**Proposition:** Brothers and sisters, love one another affectionately, outdoing one another in showing honour and living in harmony together.

**Introduction**

We have all seen actors, perhaps live on a theatre stage, but more likely and more often on T.V. on in movies. An actor’s job is to **pretend** to be someone that they are not. With the advent of high-tech equipment and computer-generated imagery (CGI) people in movies can appear to have super-powers, be non-human and to live in places that do not actually exist anywhere.

The acting profession has changed over the years, but the principles remain the same. It was a custom for Greek and Roman actors to speak into large masks that were part of their elaborate face coverings with mechanical devices for enhancing the force of their voice. The Greek word for such an actor was ‘hupokrites’ from which we get our English term ‘hypocrite’. A hypocrite is ‘*a person who claims or pretends to have certain beliefs about what is right but who behaves in a way that disagrees with those beliefs*’.

As the Apostle Paul is writing to the Roman Christians about the ways in which they are called to respond to God’s grace in Christ, He uses the word ‘anupokritos’ which literally means ‘*without play acting, without hypocrisy*’ – translated in our ESV version as ‘genuine’. Look at the first few words of our text, beginning in Romans 12:9: “*Let love be genuine*”. Some translations (e.g. NIV) have “*let love be sincere*”. Let love be without play acting, without hypocrisy, without pretence, falsehood, or deceit. Let your love be genuine.

The following section from verse 9-21 reveals some different aspects of genuine love for others. I won’t attempt to unpack all these verses in this sermon, but I will concentrate on the three ‘one another’ commands that are all aspects of genuine love.

1. “*Love one another with brotherly affection*” (v10).
2. “*Outdo one another in showing honour*” (v10).
3. “*Live in harmony with one another*” (v16).

We can also truthfully say that genuine love is also demonstrated in all the ‘one another’ command that we have already studied over the past few months:

* Bear one another's burdens
* Be kind to one another
* Encourage one another
* Accept one another
* Submit to one another
* Bear with and forgive one another
* Show hospitality to one another
* Teach and admonish one another
* Have the same care for one another
* Be at peace with one another
* Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another

This morning, from Romans 12:10 and 16 we’ll consider three more ‘one another’ commands that show us what genuine love looks like:

1. Love one another with brotherly affection (v10) – under the heading ‘genuine love for others is affectionate’.
2. Outdo one another in showing honour (v10) – under the heading ‘genuine love for others shows them honour’.
3. Live in harmony with one another (v16) – under the heading ‘genuine love for others is harmonious’.
4. **Genuine love for others is affectionate**

Have you head the phrase in English “Blood is thicker than water”? It doesn’t mean that blood is ‘gluggier’ than water. Or to put it more scientifically that the physical viscosity of blood is greater than that of water (although that is true!) This [medieval](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Middle_Ages) [proverb](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proverb) “blood is thicker than water’ means that bonds within a family are stronger than those in a friendship. This is often, but not always, true. We know that sometimes the relationships within a family can be fractured, distant, cold, unforgiving and unloving. However, in a well-functioning, closely bonded, family the different members have a genuine loving affection for one another.

The human family of Jesus was not perfect, but Christ Himself is. The gospel accounts don’t reveal much detail about the life of Jesus within his human family. However, we do know of the time when Jesus was twelve years old and remained behind in the Temple in Jerusalem. Luke records that he was submissive to his parents (Luke 2:41) and that he grew up ‘*in favour with God and man*’. He must have been perfectly loving towards his parents and perfectly loving towards his human siblings (Matt 13.55).

This kind of love is what is in view when the Apostle Paul writes to the Romans and, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit gives the Lord’s command: “*Love one another with brotherly affection*”. The people of God, saved by grace in Christ, form one family. This family is comprised first and foremost of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. One God, three persons, the ‘*same in substance, equal in power and glory*’ (WSC 6). Added into this divine primary ‘family unit’ are all the individual people whom God has chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4). These people have been adopted as sons and daughters through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will (Eph 1:5).

All who receive Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour, who believe in His name, are given the right to become children of God (John 1:12). It is because of the great love of God the Father that we, brothers and sisters, should be called ‘children of God’ and so we are (1 John 3:1). We are reminded every time we refer to one another as ‘brother’ or ‘sister’ that we are together part of God’s one family. His large family is a gloriously diverse holy nation, a chosen race, a royal priesthood (1 Pet 2:9). We share together in One Spirit and are joined to one another in the bond of peace that Christ has won for us. The genuine love that we are called to have for one another is a ‘brotherly love’. You’ve likely heard the underlying Greek word before, because it is the name of a large city in the USA - ‘Philadelphia’. This word describes a love for one another like that expressed by natural family members towards each other.

For Christians loving one another in this way is **not** natural. It is supernatural because we are mostly not related by blood to one another and many of us would not be connected to one another at all were it not for our spiritual bond in Christ. **Just as** the early churches, like that in Rome, were composed of Greeks and Jews, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarians, Scythians, slaves and freemen, men and women, **so** we likewise are composed of many different ethnic backgrounds, occupations and languages. To love one another without partiality, prejudice or favouritism is only possible when our love is motivated by the love of Christ for us (1 John 4:19). We could say that ‘blood is thicker than water’, but our bonds in Christ are ‘thicker than our blood’.

Notice that this familial love for one another is to be ‘*with brotherly affection*’. The Greek word here means having a familial love that is deeply affectionate and heartfelt with a strong concern for others in the whanau. It is not possible to interpret this command in any other way than that we are called, brothers and sisters in Christ, into close, loving, intimate, affectionate relationships with one another. We’ve seen this truth surface repeatedly with the other ‘one another’ commands and here it is again. Those who have ears to hear, let them hear.

A specific application of this general command is the affectionate love we are called to have for children who are part of this congregation, members of this church family. When children are baptised in the church, this charge is often issued to the congregation: ‘*Do you people of God receive \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ in love, and as the Lord gives you opportunity pray for him, help care for his instruction in the faith and encourage and sustain him in the fellowship of believers*’. Our love for covenant children in the church is to be sincere.

If we are to ‘let our love be genuine’, the ‘real thing’ not false, then we will cultivate and maintain close, loving, intimate, and affectionate relationships with one another. Is this what you are genuinely seeking to do? Would you describe your relationship with everyone else in this congregation as being affectionate? If your answer is ‘yes’, then this is evidence that your love is genuine – ‘the real thing’. This is also evidence that your faith is genuine – ‘the real thing’. Genuine love for others is firstly affectionate, and secondly:

1. **Genuine love for others shows them honour**

What does it mean to honour another person? It means to show high respect for them, to value them, to esteem them. Jesus Christ honoured His Heavenly Father (John 8:49). Honouring a person involves a proper attitude towards them. Honouring others is one of the commands of Scripture.

We are called to honour our civil rulers (1 Pet 2:17). This means that we need to be careful about how we speak about them. (I have heard some ungodly speech about our New Zealand Government in our Reformed church congregations over the past few months). Interesting that our Prime Minister’s official title is ‘The Right Honourable Jacinda Ardern’.

The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in preaching and teaching (1 Tim 5:17). This means that we need to be careful about how we speak to the faithful elders in the church, how we speak about them and how we act towards them. Whilst discussing, analysing and applying the sermon together in groups on Sunday or during the week is good. Having ‘roast preacher’ for dinner is not!

Specifically, children are called to honour their parents (Ex 20:12; Eph 6:2). This means that no matter how old we are, we need to be careful about how we speak to our parents, how we speak about them and how we act towards them. We have an example in Scripture of the time when the man Lot did not seem to honour his uncle Abraham (Gen 13:8-11). Abraham let the younger man go first in choosing which portion of land he would occupy so that Abraham would have the other part that was left after Lot made his selection. Lot could have shown honour to his older uncle Abraham by saying, ‘I would like you to go first and choose ahead of me’, or by choosing the less attractive piece of real estate and therefore leaving the better one for Abraham. Instead, Lot chose what he thought was the better land for himself.

Honouring another person includes putting them ahead of yourself. This used to be commonplace in Western society where gentlemen would hold doors open for ladies to go through first. Today men often don’t do this and if they do, some women refuse to go through the open door out held out for them by a male. In the past younger people on buses and trains would ordinarily give up their seats so that older travellers would not have to stand. Putting the interests of others in front of your own shows how much you value them. In a family setting honouring others shows how much you love them. The very best way to see this in action is to look at Jesus, “*who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men*” (Phil 2:6-7).

The Bible reveals that Jesus was born a human being, putting aside the honour and privileges of being God so that He could put others ahead of Himself. He became ‘the servant of all’ (Mark 9:35). We could say that He outdid every other human being in showing honour to others. He also honoured and glorified His Heavenly Father through His birth, life, death and resurrection.

It is this Jesus, brothers and sisters, who call each one of us to: “*Outdo one another in showing honour*”. ‘Outdo’ means to surpass, exceed, outperform, your brothers and sisters in honouring one another. This is to be a competition. We could say, in a good way, ‘a race to the bottom’. This is to be a contest in truthfully elevating others above yourself and aiming to do so more than others. So how can you and I honour one another? Here are some ways:

* By encouraging others and building them up (1 Thess 5:11).
* By treating others with grace and respect (e.g. 1 Thess 5:12).
* By bearing with, being patient and forgiving others (e.g. Col 3:13).
* By showing hospitality to others (1 Pet 4:9).
* By seeking to understand others so that you have the same care for them (1 Cor 12:25).

If you’ve been listening to the other sermons in this series, then I know that you’ve heard this before, but here it is again: Are you doing these things? Have you entered in the congregational competition to outdo one another in showing honour? To outdo one another in encouragement, patience, forgiveness, hospitality and understanding care? The person who leads ‘the pack’ in this contest is the greatest because (Matt 18:4) they have humbled themselves in order to honour their brother or sister in Christ. As a result of this genuine love, there is great harmony in the family of God, which brings us to our third point:

1. **Genuine love for others is harmonious**

Do you like harmony? I am not referring to any particular person whose first name is Harmony! I am also not meaning ‘*the combination of simultaneously sounded musical notes that produce a pleasing effect*’. When people live together in harmony their inter-personal relationships are peaceful and characterized by mutual trust, respect, generosity and equity. Living in harmony is good for the well-being of all people. Adam and Eve were created to live in harmony. In contrast, our New Zealand society is not very harmonious at present. There is disharmony which is damaging to the well-being of all people. Sadly this is also true within some churches where there is disharmony which is damaging to the well-being of God’s family.

Our text today reveals that one of the hallmarks of genuine love is harmony. Look with me at verse 16 “*Live in harmony with one another*”. The Greek words translated ‘live in harmony’ here literally mean ‘*be of the same mind towards one another*’ (KJV). Brothers and sisters, we are called to display the same attitude toward others, whatever their social, ethnic, economic or vaccination status. You might ask, what mindset should be the same amongst us? We’ve already seen (in the sermon on 1 Cor 12:25) that this common mind does not mean that we must all think in exactly the same way on every issue. It means that we have a renewed attitude towards others and that we do not think of ourselves as being above others.

The ‘same mind’ which we are called to have, is the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:16). This is the same heart, the identical motivation, the duplicate attitude of Jesus. He is the One who calls us to love one another: just as He has loved us (John 13:34). The mind of Christ is revealed in many places in Scripture, one of which is Philippians 2:2-4: “*Complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.* *Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others*” (Phil 2:3-4).

Are you looking to the interests of others in our church family, especially those who have different views and opinions about all the things that threaten to divide us? I would say that now, more than ever, is the time for each one of us to demonstrate the genuineness of our love for one another. This is the time, more than ever, to extend an affectionate love towards one another. I don’t necessarily mean hugs and or warm handshakes here. I do mean close relationships with one another. We’ll need to strive harder for this because we cannot meet together as a whole congregation in one place at one time. However, there is opportunity now for us to meet with different groups of people in their or our homes when our group is not invited to a particular service. In many ways it easier to extend affectionate brotherly or sisterly love in a smaller group setting. Let’s use the constraints of the ‘Protection Framework’ to protect our unity together in Christ!

This is the time more than ever, to enter into the competition to outdo one another in showing honour. Now is the time to put others first, to be sympathetic and understanding to their particular situation, to respect others by humbling yourself. Let’s use the providential blessings of our New Zealand Government’s pandemic response to compete for the honour of others. Looking out not only for our own interests, but also the interests of others. This is the time, more than ever, to live in harmony with one another. Let’s use the divisions in the world around us as an opportunity to ‘unite against disharmony’. Don’t wear a metaphorical mask under which you pretend to be someone you are not. Don’t wear that kind of mask which results in an insincere love for others. Take off your metaphorical mask and be who you are in Christ and then let your love for others be genuine.

I guarantee that if each one of us has the mind of Christ we will be the most protected against the forces that threaten our well-being: the devil, the unbelieving world and our own flesh (HCLD52). Everyone needs a protection framework. I am not referring to set of COVID-19 response laws, but to the glorious gospel. Perhaps you have never experienced, or seldom received genuine love? Perhaps church life for you has been characterised by distant cold relationships with others? Perhaps you have not received honour and respect from others in the church because you are different from many others, or perhaps because they have not taken the time to understand you and your situation? Perhaps you have known deep divisions in church life, and you have seen the damage that disharmony can do?

Whatever your circumstances today, first and foremost you and I need the genuine, sincere, love of Christ. The humble, affectionate, loving Saviour offers this to any who will come today. With Jesus as your ‘older brother’, in the family of God you are ultimately fully protected, and your eternal future secured by the One who loved you before you first loved Him.

AMEN.