

Romans 12:9-10 (NKJV)

9 Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.

10 Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another;

For the last two weeks we talked about love. We talked about it kind-of at a distance. We talked about how verse 9 was painting the big picture. Well verse 10 gives us our working instructions. As Christians we can't just be people who **sentimentally** love and care **about** people. We are responsible to actually **exhibit** that love. We must **do** the things that true love demands. So this morning we get to the first thing in the list.

Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love

Kindly affectionate- philostorgos- this word is made up of Philos and Storgos. Philos means love. Storgos means family. This is the affection that you have for a person, not because of **how they treat you**, not because of **their ability or talent**, not because of any **trait they might exhibit**. It is the affection you have simply because of your **relatedness**. It is the love that you have because that person happened to be born of the same mother.

So where our text says **be kindly affectionate**, there is a lot more meaning to the words being used. In fact what this is saying is a bit remarkable. This word is essentially saying treat your brothers and sisters in Christ with the same intensity of regard as you do those with the same blood.

Then let's go on. What does **brotherly love** mean?

The word for brotherly love is Philadelphia. Again we have phila, similar to philos- love and delphia or adelphos means brother.

So brotherly love is essentially loving a person as a brother. Look what Paul is doing here. You might think the center for Christian life is your **storgos family- your blood relations**. You might think that the most important relationships you have are the ones that are carried on under the roof of your house. You might think that those are the boundaries that clarify **those you are responsible for** and **those you are not**, those **you must meet their needs** and those that **you are not** obligated to meet, those you must love and those you must simply tolerate. But that is not true. There are a lot of Christian books out there that would paint this picture. There are even popular Christian groups out there that would create such an impression. Maybe it is a reaction to how badly Christian men and women have carried out their responsibilities to each other that the focus has become on the family institutions. But in reality that is not the primary focus in

the New Testament. The focus is not primarily about just **Jesus and you**. It is not primarily about **Jesus and your kin**. It is primarily focused on **Jesus and His bride**, the church.

Now don't misunderstand me. I am not saying that married men and women don't have **specific** defined responsibilities toward each other and their offspring. They clearly do in scripture. These responsibilities scan a wide array. Men must provide for their families. If they don't they are worse than infidels. Men and women must allow each other the proper use of their bodies in marriage. Men and women are responsible to train their children. Children are responsible to obey and honor their parents. And adult children are responsible to take care of their elderly parents. (I am liking that truth more and more as I get older.) All those things are true and specifically commanded by scripture. So I am not saying our family relationships don't matter.

I am also **not** saying that the church family **turns into** those relationships. The elders don't become the fathers in the family. That would be absurd. No. The family remains intact. We are not talking about **mystifying** the family. Scripture does not do that. Husbands, wives and children still remain distinct and their responsibilities are clear in scripture.

But what I am saying is this: the family is not the **primary** focus in the New Testament. In fact the Christian focus in our world has seemed to narrow to the "me and mine" idea in my lifetime. And the family is treated as some mystical provision that God has granted believers. But I think if you read the New Testament in a setting or two what you will find is the primary focus of the writings is on the Church. That is the miracle. Family is treated in a more utilitarian fashion. Commands must be given to provide order and strengthen the institution. There must be authority and it must flow from husband to wife to children. And a man is commanded to love his wife. He must set a biblical example of Christ to his family. The wife must respect and obey her husband or chaos will break out in the family. Children are told to obey their parents and that represents the order that God wants in a household. All of these things are true. But a lot more press is dedicated in the pages of the Bible to how believers are to **regard each other**. The **most extensive instructions about love** are done in the **context of the body of believers**. And the family's greatest purpose is to usher people into the church.

You see, some people regard church as a resource for their family. They think of it in terms of "what **really matters** is my family" and God has given me the church to **help me** with my family. While it is true that the church often helps families to

heal and become what they should be, the family is not the higher priority. The church is. If I understand it properly, the family is designed to be part of the church. But it is the church that will be ushered into heaven, not the family. And those without a storge family are even **given** the church family.

Look at what Christ said.

Mark 10:29-30

29 So Jesus answered and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's,

30 who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time--houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions--and in the age to come, eternal life.

Do you see what this is saying? If life in Christ costs a person their storge relationships, they will not be left without. And what will replace it. What will replace this significant loss? The church. Brothers and sisters will gain a hundred more family relationships. And does Christ apologize for this? Does He say, I am sorry. I know that is not as good as the storge relationships? No. Not at all. Because Christ highly values those who are His children.

So this is what Paul commanded us.

Let's also look at what scripture says about when we do the opposite of this instruction in Romans.

1 John 2:9-11 (NKJV)

9 He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now.

10 He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him.

11 But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

Christ continually put up this litmus test of genuine belief. And the test was- do we love our fellow believers. Notice that the test is not- do you love your storge family. That is commanded, but that is not the test. The test is, do you love your Christian brother. Do you treat him like family?

1 John 3:10, 17-19

10 In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest:

Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.

17 But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?

18 My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

19 And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.

Notice how these verses get more specific. We see that this love must take action. It must meet needs. It must get the job done. It cannot be left in the world of good intentions and sentiment.

Now let's look back at our text again.

Be kindly affectionate (family loving) to one another with brotherly love

Now, let me ask you. Do you have any brothers or sisters in your storge family? Did they ever **irritate you**? Did they ever **mistreat you**? Did they ever **misunderstand you**? Did you ever **fight** with them? Did it ever **get heated** with them?

Most of us would say yes to all those things if we had brothers and sisters. My brother fell down a flight of concrete steps when he was young and it left a scar on his forehead. I was always grateful for that because it provided an early warning alert. His scar would turn red whenever he got angry. It gave me an opportunity to run.

Now if you fought with your siblings, what would you do? Would you attempt to **disown** them? Would you move in with a new family? Would you refuse to ever speak to them again? Would you disown the relationship you had with them? No. Not unless it was a last resort. Normally you would fight it out. You would do your best to come to an understanding with this person because they were not going to go away and you knew it.

Guess what. The same is true of the church. It is made up of very flawed people. It is made up of sinners. It is made up of people who do not perfectly know themselves. And as such they will not perfectly treat you. They will be much like our brothers and sisters were to us if we had a normal family. We cannot expect that **because these flawed humans are Christians** that they will **now act perfectly**. It isn't going to happen. The instructions that Paul is giving us wouldn't be necessary if that was so.

No, we are in the family of Christ and our brothers and sisters are sometimes going to be very difficult to get along with. There are times when we might want to **throttle them**. But don't be dismayed. It is highly likely that there are times when **they will want to throttle us**. So it all works out.

I want to read something from Martyn Lloyd Jones.

“And so it works out in practice in this way: as human beings we are always ready to do things **for** and **with** our relatives that we would not do with other people. We are ready to correct **other** people’s children for doing **certain things** which we do not correct **our own children** for doing. That is human nature. We **defend** our own. We make excuses. We are always **on the defensive** for our own. We can always understand what they are doing. And Paul is saying that this should be equally true of our relationship to one another as Christians. We should feel this same innate desire.”

What Mr Jones is saying is we treat family differently. They get a preference just because of who they are. We don’t treat them the same **because** they are **family**. That is what the essence of our text this morning is saying. Treat your Christian brothers and sisters as family.

If you hear gossip about them, stand up for them. If someone is speaking of them as if they are assuming the worst, stand up for them and assume the best. Fight for them like they live under your same roof, like they are in your same bloodline. It isn’t complicated. But that is clearly what Paul is saying.

If you truly regard them as family, you will take risks with them. If you think they are headed down a bad path you will tell them. It would be hideous if you did not love them well enough to do that. And when they respond badly, keep treating them like family. Be patient and wait. Odds are they will come to their senses. Odds are they will remember who their family is. Odds are they will remember who loves them.

Isn’t this what family is? Isn’t that how we act as families? Think about it. Why do we so idealize our church relationships? Do people suddenly stop being human when they join the church? Do they quit having weaknesses and blind spots? Do they quit having imperfections and fleshly impulses? None of us are foolish enough to believe that is true.

So why is it such a surprise when we find that a brother or sister needs confronted? Why is it such a surprise when we find that we have harmed someone without ever intending to do so?

When we act like the true church, the interactions will begin to look more and more like the ones that happen in our storge families. They will be real. They will be emotionally charged. But they will be truthful. And they will be loving. The sugar coated niceness will go away and the real will come out. And do you know what? Grace will cover it. Love will cover it. Christianity is meant to be lived in the real, not in the pretended.

I very much intend to encourage us all this morning. We are commanded by God through Paul to treat each other like family. That is what Paul is saying. That means we will care deeply about each other. We will see that we are connected to every other member. We cannot disassociate ourselves from each other. We are in this together. And as such, we must involve ourselves for each others good. Don't expect it to go **smooth** all the time. Don't expect it to always be **peaceful**. Don't expect that everyone will always be **rational**. Don't expect that everyone will respond positively at first to correction.

And at the end of the day, we can never take our football and go home. We can't quit on each other. We can't disassociate ourselves with each other. Why? We are related. We are family. And that is a wonderful thing. Because who wants to travel through this life alone?

Now, with all of this being commanded of us we might wonder, **how can I do this?** How can I have these feelings towards my flawed co- **body members?** Should I try to drum these feelings up? Should I **pretend** to have them? No.

Remember where we started this discourse? Verses 1 and 2. We started in view of God's mercies. So how does that help us?

What is it that you needed **a boatload of** in order to be saved by God? Was it justice? No. It was mercy and grace. All **we deserved** was hell and nothing more. And how did you get saved? God reached out with grace and called you to Himself.

Another way of putting this would be, how did you **get into** God's family? Was it due to your moral superiority? Were you pursuing God so vigorously and relentlessly that He had to let you in? We all know that was not the case. We were doing our best to **do our own thing** and to **maximize our pleasure** when God intruded into our lives to save us. None of us have a different story. We may have different ways of saying it, but we were **all blind** and **God** caused us to see. We were **all dead** but **God** rose us from the dead. That is how **He** describes it. Now if that is true of us, and God had the mercy and grace to save **us**, how could we withhold love **to those** who were saved by God **exactly the same way?** We can't. And that is the essence of where our feelings come from. We are bonded in Grace! We are mutual recipients. There will be no one in the kingdom of God that **required more grace** than **we** needed to be saved. We all were born into the kingdom of God the same way. And that is what our thoughts must come back to when we start feeling **superior** to any other child of God.

Can you see now why bailing out and moving to another church to avoid the conflict is not an answer? It would be like calling yourself another last name so you no longer were regarded as part of your family. We wouldn't do it in our storge families. Why would we even think of it in our spiritual families.

I think it is a travesty the way that many people in our culture switch from church to church for their convenience. That is awful. They will never gain the benefit of what the church is there to provide them with. And they will never provide the service to Christ that every believer is designed to provide.

, in honor giving preference to one another

Honor- This is an interesting word. Carla has a necklace that used to belong to my grandmother. She wants to get it appraised to find out if the shiny things are diamonds or glass. My mom is pretty sure they are glass. But the result of the appraisal will represent the meaning of the word honor. It is the result of an appraisal of value. And in this case the assumption is that the appraisal comes back with a **high** value.

Now giving preference is also interesting. It means to go before. The RSV version says **Outdo one another in showing honor.**

There are three possible options of interpretation of this verse.

The first is the RSV interpretation. We should **go ahead** in the giving preference to one another. In other words we should **do it better and earlier** than those around us. We should **lead** in this process.

The second is that we **walk before others**, much as a man walks before a woman and opens the door for her. This is the preference we should show to believers, going before them for their good, for their benefit.

The third is the NKJV interpretation that says we **give preference**, that we put the other first. It looks to me like that is the weakest of the applications from this particular text.

I think maybe RSV gets it right. We should all be resolved to quickly put others ahead of ourselves.

This honor assigns real and genuine value. This has nothing to do with flattery. It has nothing to do with **saying something positive to get something positive** in return. There is no hypocrisy in real honor. Honor tells the truth. It grants true appreciation. It is quick to give credit where credit is due. It does not even register the effect of the light another's superior actions may **cast on one's self.**

There is no room for jealousy or envy. Honor is applying to a person the credit they deserve for an action they have done.

Now let's put the whole thing together here.

How are we to treat each other? Look around you at the faces of those we must apply this to. We are to treat each other in such a way that we rush to give them preference. We hurry to give them treatment according to their worth. And what is their worth based on? The appraisal of Christ. Christ ascribed His death to that person. They were, in a sense, worth His death. He valued them enough to die for them. He sent in the appraisal and it came back with that value.

Look around you this morning. That is the appraisal that every child of God has come back with. It is not our intrinsic value. It is not the value we carried as if we were a little treasure. It is an assigned value.

The American dollar used to be backed by gold. The worth of an actual dollar is probably zero. All it is useful for would be to burn for heat. But it had an assigned value, a value given to it from an outside source, that made it truly valuable. That is the kind of value and honor we are talking about.

So we are to rush ahead of these valued individuals, as it were, to open every door they need opened. We are to regard it as a privilege to serve them by giving them those things that they need.

And even more than that we are to do it as if they are our family member.

Now, let me ask you this question. Who is devoted to your good? Who can you count on to be looking for your best interest? Are they the people around you in this body? It should be?

And who here would you guess would say that **it is you** that is looking out for their good? Who would say that you are quick to open spiritual doors for them? Who is it that you are looking out for?

This stuff doesn't just happen. It requires action. It requires effort. It requires **acting** like that person is part of your family.

And there is something else I wanted to point out. I cannot remember ever calling my brother, brother Butch. When he arrives at my house I never say, I am so glad you are here brother Butch. Why? Because he knows I am his brother. And the relationship we have now does not need any reminder that we have similar blood running through our veins. I am not trying to say that is some kind of a sin if we call each other brother, but the reality is, it isn't necessary. It is very much better if we truly **regard** each other as brothers and sisters. That is far better than the title.

There is one more thing I would like to bring out here.

in honor giving preference to one another;

In order to carry this out we must have a proper regard of ourselves. We must see ourselves as we truly are. And when we see **that**, we see that we are in desperate need of Grace. There are many people in the body of Christ that walk around looking for insults against them. They run everything through the sieve of person attack. And they tend to find a great deal they can be personally insulted about. But the truth of the matter is that a true believer who understands their need for grace can find very little to be insulted about.

You see, when **we see ourselves as we truly are**.... When we see all of our sin... when we see how we have rebelled against God and He has relentlessly pursued us to save us.... When all that is true, we begin to get the correct perspective. Maybe a person arises with **an accusation against us** that is not completely true. There is no sense in us trying to look all **wronged and insulted**. There is no sense us acting like our **wonderful characters** have just been affronted. We have no reason to be insulted. The worst that can be said of our attacker is that they are **inaccurate**. They did not properly identify our sins. And really, how offended can we be in that oversight?

True humility will save us from a lot of pretension. When we see ourselves from the perspective that God sees us, we are freed from acting as if we deserve to be treated by royalty. And we can begin to put others ahead of ourselves.

Let's close with this instruction from Paul

Philippians 2:1-4 (NKJV)

1 Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy,

2 fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.

3 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.

4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.