

Love One Another

Romans 12:9-18

Today we conclude our series, Serve the Church. We started in John 13, studying Jesus' example when he washed the disciples' feet and then commanded them to follow His example. Loving and serving one another is not optional for the Christ follower. These are central to who we are and essential to what we do.

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." John 13:34-35

Our love for one another is not only a litmus test of our obedience to Christ but is also how the world will know that our Gospel is true and powerful. If we can't or won't love one another, how could God's love for us in Christ be compelling to others? But if we have been transformed by the love of Christ ourselves, the natural result will be that we do love and serve, encourage and uphold one another - laboring together for the glory of God and the building of His Church.

I am going to read a covenant statement you should have seen in the email on Friday. Don't read it with me yet. You'll have a chance to do that at the end of the message today. These words are also printed on an insert in your worship program. Be careful. Vows in the Bible are serious things. It is better not to make a promise than to make one with no intention of keeping it. ***Consider the words of this covenant and if you are ready to make these promises today.***

Serve the Church Covenant

We, the children of God gathered as Oakwood Community Church, in view of God's mercy to us in Christ, ***this day present ourselves to God as a living sacrifice***, made holy and acceptable to Him by the blood of Jesus.

We commit together today to help each other resist the temptations of this world and ***to focus on God's purposes and priorities for us***, discerning what is good and most pleasing in His eyes.

Knowing our own weaknesses and our many sins ***we profess our complete dependence on God and His grace***, knowing that even our faith in Jesus was an undeserved gift from Him by which we were united with our Savior and covered with His righteousness.

As those who are one with Christ ***we joyfully acknowledge that we are one body*** and we need each other. Having received different gifts of grace from the Holy Spirit ***we covenant***

together today to use our gifts to bring glory to the Lord Jesus Christ by laboring together to build up our local church.

We promise today and hereafter to love and serve one another, to encourage and challenge one another in the Lord and to use **every breath** He gives us, **every minute** remaining to us and **every resource** entrusted to us to honor the Lord Jesus Christ, to strengthen His Church in Tampa and to bring the Gospel to the nations.

Lord, hear our sincere desires and commitments today and **enable us, by your Spirit, to keep these promises** that in everything you may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

That covenant attempts to summarize our whole series.

1. As Servants of Jesus Christ
2. Fully Devoted to the Lord
3. United as One Body
4. We Use our Gifts
5. To Love and Serve One Another

So let's walk through this section of Romans 12 and we will see **fifteen characteristics of love** in the church. 1 Corinthians 13 is considered "the love chapter" of the Bible. But as I studied this passage it struck me that Romans 12 is also all about love, just as John 13 exhorts us to love and 1 Peter 4, our theme verse, calls us to love.

"Above all, **keep loving one another earnestly**, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, **use it to serve one another**, as good stewards of God's varied grace." 1 Peter 4:8-10

The command is clear - believers are called to love and serve one another. Let's look at fifteen descriptions of Christian love and how we can share that love with one another.

We start in verse 9 with authentic love.

1. **Authentic Love**

"Let love be genuine." Romans 12:9

First of all, love must be sincere. It must be real. A more literal translation here would be "**Let love be without hypocrisy.**" As the poets from the '90s band expressed it, "More than words to show you feel that your love for me is real." If you say, "I love you," and it's only words without actions, then it is not real love. Now, what the guys in that band were looking for is not real love

either, looking instead for the indulgence of their own desires. But there is an important grain of truth in their song.

Love must be genuine. To quote other poets from the '90s, "Luv is a verb." D-d-d down with the DC Talk.

- Think about your husband or wife, or a future spouse. Do you want them to just say, "I love you"? Or do you want their love to be authentic - to actually deliver with actions? It needs to mean something, right?
- Guys, flowers by themselves are not magic. They can be helpful as a gesture and symbol of your love. But if you stay at work every night this week and don't call or text and just send flowers home with a courier, your wife is not likely to feel that as authentic love.
- It's the same in the church. James writes about the need for real, authentic faith:

1. Authentic Love

"If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,' without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead." James 2:15-17

Love must be, first of all, authentic; without hypocrisy or empty words. It must be real. It must be a verb - a commitment. That's what the covenant at the end is about. Turning our words into actions. "Love must be sincere."

Second, love must be pure.

2. Pure Love

"Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good." Romans 12:9b

Love desires what is best for the beloved. If love is sincere, it hates anything that threatens to harm the beloved. The opposite of love is not hate. The opposite of love is apathy. **True love hates intensely. It hates that which harms the one it loves.**

This is why God hates sin and impurity, especially sexual sin - because it is so harmful to us, the ones He loves. And so God calls us to hate what is evil - to detest it, to reject it, to turn away from it and cling to what is good. We must be active in the fight against sin, resisting the conforming pressures of this world and being transformed by the renewal of our minds as we increasingly hunger and thirst for righteousness and cultivate an appetite for what is good and pleasing and holy and acceptable to God.

2. Pure Love

Love protect and provides.

Love does not use another person.

Young women, if a young man says he loves you but then shows that he wants certain things from you - that proves that he doesn't love YOU, he loves HIMSELF. He doesn't want to love you, he wants to USE you. True love hates what is evil. **True love will fight for your protection and fight for your purity.** True love provides for you so you can grow closer to God and grow in holiness.

Third, love is intentional.

3. **Intentional** Love

"Love one another." Romans 12:10

Love is a command, not a suggestion. So our love cannot be an afterthought, it must be a priority. **We must pro-actively seek ways to love one another**, not reactively wait and see if an opportunity might come up.

Have you found a place yet to serve in the church? We are doing this Serve the Church series right now very intentionally. We are preparing for an important season of ministry that starts next Sunday with the re-launch of TreeHouse, our children's program. And then on September 9 we kick off two worship services.

This fall will be "all hands on deck," in terms of making everything happen here at Oakwood. Please don't wait for an invitation or request to serve - be proactive and intentional! Look at the handout with different opportunities to serve. Contact a ministry leader and set up a time to learn more about how you could help them!

Fourth, our love should be unconditional.

4. **Unconditional** Love

"Love one another with brotherly affection." Romans 12:10

We are all children of God, one family in the Lord. We are brothers and sisters in Christ with God as our heavenly Father. Family love is unconditional love. You don't qualify to be in a family. You don't set conditions on other people and say, **"I will love you IF..." That is transactional love, and it is the way of the world.**

Our love in the church should be unconditional. "I love you, no matter what." Family is messy. When you live together and do life together with brothers and sisters, you step on each other's toes, you have weird uncles and domineering aunts. You have aging grandparents and noisy babies. It's like the big strange family in Meet the Robinsons.



That is a great picture of church family. We are a strange gathering, but we accept one another without condition and we love each other no matter what. Our love is *unconditional*.

Fifth, love is respectful.

5. *Respectful* Love

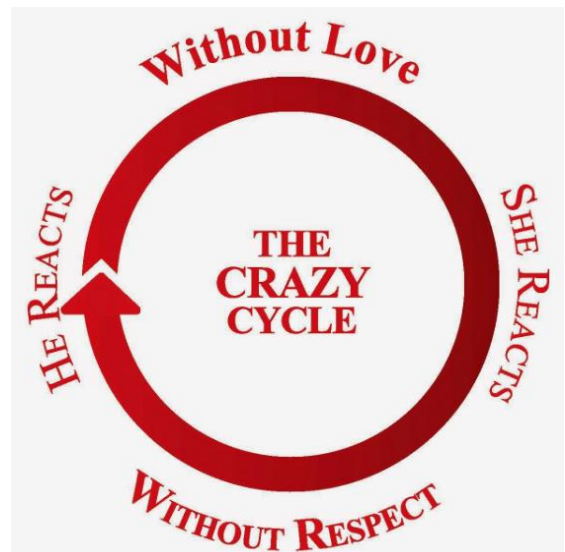
“Outdo one another in showing honor.” Romans 12:10

Love does not put itself first, but lowers itself to serve others and place them ahead. Love shows respect and honor.

Have you seen ***the Crazy Cycle*** from the Love and Respect book by Emerson Eggerichs? [Use image below as slide. Include *Love and Respect* by Emerson Eggerichs on the slide.]

When a woman feels unloved in a relationship she reacts in disrespectful ways. When a man feels disrespected he reacts in unloving ways. This creates a crazy cycle that can continue for days, weeks, months and years. In fact, it will continue until one person absorbs the sin of the other and breaks the cycle.

One of my favorite lines from Eggerichs is the one about who should break the cycle: ***whoever is more mature***.



Doesn't that sting? I don't want to absorb that critical comment and respond in a loving way. I want to get all defensive and sulk for a while, or I want to tell her what I really think about her.

That is a helpful communication principle in marriage or any relationship. Love and respect mutually reinforce each other. We all need both love and respect, of course, but ***men tend to be more wired to respond to honor and admiration and women more wired to respond to affection.***

Our goal in the church should be to outdo one another in showing honor - creating a **culture of mutual appreciation**, admiration and encouragement.

Sixth, love should be energetic.

6. **Energetic** Love

"Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord." Romans 12:11

Church should never be boring or stale or stagnant. As we worship and serve the Lord, filled with gratitude and joy for all he has done for us, there should be no sloth here, no reluctance or slowness to respond to His leading. Rather, there should be ***zeal and passion***, a fervency of spirit that goes after things, that moves ahead, ***that spurs one another on to love and good deeds.***

Love should be energetic, a living and moving thing, constantly growing; constantly looking for new ways to serve the Lord and one another.

Seventh, love is joyful.

7. **Joyful** Love

"Rejoice in hope." Romans 12:12

For you old married couples, ***remember your first love.*** Remember your first date, when you asked her out and she said yes. Remember how undeserving you felt, how insecure you were and unsure what she would say. Remember the thrill of being with her, of hearing her voice, of talking long into the night, of walking together for so long that your feet would ache but you didn't want to say anything because you didn't want it to end.

That's what church should be like. Remember the joy of being included in Christ. Remember your first love for Him. Remember how it felt to be accepted - fully and totally embraced in the church family, warts and all (as Dave Dorsey likes to say). Love in the church is a joyful, wonderful, inspiring thing.

Eighth, love endures.

8. **Enduring** Love

“Be patient in tribulation.” Romans 12:12

Love never fails. It never quits. It perseveres through every trial, it presses on through every challenge.

Many of us have been through severe challenges in recent months and years. We've done three funerals here in the last four months. I know many of us have loved ones battling cancer or other diseases. In this world we do have trouble. But through Christ we have overcome the world and we can endure every hardship, upheld by His all sufficient love and power.

Brothers and sisters, press on. If you feel your strength is failing, let that remind you all the more of your need for a church family around you. ***We need each other*** desperately in this dark and broken world. Trials are much darker when you endure them alone. **Share your burdens and fears**, let others in the church family carry them with you. Don't walk alone. We are on this journey together. And we love each other through the valley of the shadow of death, knowing our Good Shepherd is with us.

Nine. Our love is a prayerful love.

9. **Prayerful** Love

“Be constant in prayer.” Romans 12:12

“If we truly love people we will desire for them far more than it is within our power to give them and this will lead us to prayer.” Richard Foster, *A Celebration of Discipline*

Prayer is the overflow of genuine love. Make intercession for your brothers and sisters in the church one of your top priorities. Even if you're like me and you're not generally a list-maker, make a list of people you are praying for and keep track of specific needs they have. This will encourage you more than you can imagine as you come back to it week after week, month after month, year after year, and see how faithful and gracious God has been to answer your prayers - often in ways you would never have guessed.

Let's keep prayer central in our personal lives and in our small groups, even as we try to prioritize prayer in our worship service. ***Let's say thank you to our prayer team*** for how they keep this priority in front of us with reminders in our weekly email and a prayer focus each week in the worship program, with missionary prayer updates, special resources and opportunities!

Ten. Love is generous.

10. **Generous** Love

“Contribute to the needs of the saints.” Romans 12:13

Giving and sharing was one of the most striking features of the early church. They sold houses and land so they could meet the practical, day to day needs of the other believers among them. The result was that no one had any needs - no believers went hungry. Any who had two cloaks shared them with those who had none. Any who had two pairs of sandals shared them with those who had none. Those who had houses opened them up to the ones who were homeless. Those who had money shared it with those who were in need.

Jews cared for Gentiles and Gentiles cared for Jews. Even Samaritans were embraced in the early church family. Orphans and widows were cared for, their practical needs were met. Christian love is generous, sacrificial and ongoing.

Brothers and sisters, **your giving to support Oakwood is an act of faith and an act of worship.** Hear God's Word in this passage - "Contribute to the needs of the saints." Giving to our fellow believers is not optional, it is a clear directive from our Lord. Prioritize your giving to your local church. Start there. Then beyond your giving to Oakwood support missionaries and other causes that advance the Gospel and build the Kingdom of Jesus as the Spirit leads you.

Listen to this from John Piper in a sermon in 1982 on tithing.

"The issue is not, How much must I give? but, *How much dare I keep?* Not: Shall I tithe? But: How much of the money that I hold in trust for Christ can I take for my private use? The financial issue in the church today is not tithing, but exorbitance of lifestyle."

"The question is not can I afford to tithe, but can I justify the lifestyle that consumes 90% of my income? And behind that is the question: *Do I love to use God's money to spread justice and mercy and spiritual hope in the world*, or do I prefer to embezzle his money to purchase more and more personal comfort?"

"The question whether the work of Christ here at Bethlehem in 1982 will be adequately supported is really the question of where your treasure is. And where your treasure is, there is your heart. Therefore, I do not seek what is yours but you. Amen." John Piper

Tithing, giving 10% is the OLD TESTAMENT standard. The New Testament rarely refers to tithing, establishing a new standard based on the new commandment to LOVE ONE ANOTHER as Christ has loved us - and that was a sacrificial love that gave EVERYTHING, not just 10%. True love is generous. Check out the church blog (www.oakwoodfl.org/blog/) for more on this.

Eleven: Love is hospitable.

11. *Hospitable* Love

"Seek to show hospitality." Romans 12:13

In ancient culture ***hospitality was expected*** - which meant hosting family when they came in from out of town. It meant taking your aging parents into your home as the standard procedure, not the exceptional measure. It meant that if you have a house, you would use it when strangers showed up in your town and needed a place to stay. This was not an optional gesture of good will but a clear expectation that was tied to the honor of your family.

Let's continue to be a welcoming church that warmly embraces all who come, not only to our Sunday morning service but actively inviting into our small groups and individual homes!

Four more.

12. **Gracious** Love

“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them... Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.” Romans 12:14,17

When we were sinners, living in rebellion against God, He sent His Son to die for us. He did not repay us evil for evil but absorbed our evil into the flesh of His Son so He could bless us instead of cursing us.

As a family of the forgiven, we should be the most gracious and forgiving people on the planet.

Similarly, love is compassionate.

13. **Compassionate** Love

“Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.” Romans 12:15

God did not remain distant from our suffering and pain. ***God came near to us in Jesus Christ.*** He entered our world so He could experience every struggle and sorrow and temptation we do. This is compassion - coming in; coming near.

God came near to us in Christ and continues to be near to us through His Spirit. That is what church should feel like - **extending God's compassion to one another** - celebrating with those who rejoice and mourning with those who mourn. Putting the needs of the others first as God has done for us.

14. **Unifying** Love

“Live in harmony with one another... If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.” Romans 12:16,18

“Blessed are the peacemakers; for they will be called sons of God.” We are most like Jesus when we give up our rights to make peace and protect the unity of the church.

The devil loves division. He loves to sow seeds of distrust and discord. He knows that if he can get us distracted by annoying each other and fighting with each other we will be far less effective in accomplishing the mission Jesus has given us.

We must work for unity. We are ONE in Christ - we are members of one another. Let's live out that unity, protecting the peace, oneness and wholeness that we have in Christ.

Finally, true love is humble.

15. **Humble Love**

“Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.” Romans 12:16

Love when it is young and fresh always defers to the other. Guys, in those early months of dating were you obsessed with watching football and reading business magazines? No, you followed her around like a little puppy, getting engrossed in whatever random girly thing she was doing. You did not put yourself first, you sacrificed your desires and preferences to impress the girl.

Girls, remember those early months of dating? You didn't even understand football or baseball, but you went to his games. You didn't understand accounting or economics (no offense) but you let him talk about them because you loved that he was passionate about it.

That's what love does. ***It gives up its own desires and preferences for the beloved.*** Love is not proud, hard and unyielding. It is humble, soft and always thinking of the other.

Love is authentic, pure, intentional, unconditional, respectful, energetic, joyful, enduring, prayerful, generous, hospitable, gracious, compassionate, unifying and humble.

Think of those **fifteen characteristics of love** and think of ***how PERFECTLY Jesus lived them out for YOU.*** His love was more than words, it was **real-life** actions. He was perfectly **holy**, satisfying the righteous requirements of the Law. He was **intentional**, every act in line with the Father's will. He gave Himself up for us **without condition** - as a completely free gift of divine grace.

The one most worthy of **honor and respect**, has given all of His glory to us! Jesus' love respects us and makes us worthy of honor from God and one another. Jesus' love is **energetic**, passionate, zealous and active. He never sleeps or slumbers, he never takes His eye off of us, not even for a nanosecond.

Jesus' love for us is overflowing with **joy**. He gave himself up, “for the joy set before Him,” the joy of pleasing the Father and uniting us with Himself in a reconciled eternal relationship. Jesus' love **endures** forever. It never fails. It never quits. Jesus will never, ever give up on you.

Jesus' love is **prayerful**. He lives, even now, to make intercession for us. His love is **generous**. He laid down His life as the once for all sacrifice for wretched, rebellious, idolatrous sinners.

Jesus is perfectly **hospitable**. He went to prepare a place for us and opened the way there by dying on the cross for us. Jesus has welcomed you into the family of God entirely as a gift of His grace. For Jesus' love is the essence of **grace**. When we deserved punishment, wrath and condemnation Jesus instead gave us mercy, love and infinite favor.

Jesus is the all-**compassionate** one - perfectly identifying with every one of us in our needs. He rejoices when you rejoice, He weeps when you weep. He knows exactly what you feel every second of every day and He walks through it all with you. His love is **unifying**. He prayed desperately for the unity of the church and continues to empower us for witness by directing His Spirit to help us live out peace, harmony and unity in the church, "that the world may believe" in Him.

Finally, Jesus' love is **humble**. He did not cling to the glory He deserved, but set that aside to become the servant of all of mankind. He humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death even the shameful death of crucifixion.

Brothers and sisters - as we started this series so we finish it - ***by remembering how much Jesus has loved and served us***. That is our model and our motivation to love and serve one another.

Now, look again at **the Serve the Church Covenant**. Take a deep breath and count the cost. Are you ready to make this commitment to your brothers and sisters at Oakwood today? If you're not, please don't say the words. Still stand with us, I have no interest in embarrassing anyone today. But if you do not mean these words, then do not say them. "Love must be genuine."

If you are ready to make this commitment, then please stand with me and let's say this together as a solemn promise, devoting ourselves to the Lord!

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