



## Love with Authenticity

### Gospel Culture, Part 3

Romans 12:9-10

David Sunday

February 4, 2018

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As we open Your Word, we ask Lord that You will be building up your church. Through the witness and fellowship of this congregation—and all churches that confess Your name—may the earth be filled with Your glory. May the Fox Valley see the glory of the Lord. We pray that every valley would be lifted up and every mountain and hill made low, that the rough places would become level and the uneven ground a plain.

Let Your glory be revealed in this valley, and may all people see it together. Let the students of St. Charles North and St. Charles East, South Elgin High School, Larkin, Elgin, Geneva High, Batavia High School see the glory of the Lord. Let Your glory shine in these schools. Let the grieving see your glory. Please touch and comfort those who are struggling today, those who are weary, those who are sad.

Comfort all who are sad and burdened today and help us to love one another with the love that comes from You through Your Spirit. Make us a community that is marked by Jesus-like love. We ask this in His name. Amen.

We're going to lick into low gear as we work through all of Paul's exhortations in Romans 12, beginning today in verse nine. Last week we talked about becoming the kind of church that has such an impact on our community that if we were to disappear, people all over would wonder where we went—and they would miss us. They would say, "They've helped us and been a blessing to us."

But in order for that to be true in our community, it will require us to do more than simply getting our doctrine right. Make no mistake—doctrine matters. What we teach about the Bible and believe about the doctrines in it do matter. We love doctrine in this church. We preach and teach and treasure it. But how many of your neighbors right now are interested in reading Calvin's Institutes with you? How many of them want to open up Wayne Grudem's Systematic Theology? We love that. But my guess is most of your neighbors aren't yet interested in what you believe about doctrine.

But they are interested in love. They do care about that. And it may be that as we love one another as Jesus loves that people will begin to know—as Jesus said—that we are indeed His disciples and our love could become the gateway for them wanting to know about our doctrine.

About three years ago our elders met for a retreat at Ross Stern's home where we read and taught one another from The Gospel: How the Church Portrays the Beauty of Christ, a wonderful little book by Ray Ortlund. It had fireworks on every page for me. I think it describes so attractively the vision I hope we will get as we work through Romans 12.

He wrote, "Gospel doctrine creates gospel cultures called churches, where wonderful things happen to unworthy people for the glory of Christ alone." That's what we mean when we sing, "All I have is Christ. I was lost in darkest night, I didn't know the way. But You rescued me when I was headed toward the grave." He's done wonderful things for unworthy people through the glory of Christ. Then Ortlund said, "But it doesn't end in our churches. A gospel-defined church is a prophetic sign that points beyond itself."

Here's the metaphor I hope you will get in your mind. A church shaped by the gospel—a culture shaped by the gospel—"It is a model home of the new neighborhood Christ is building for eternity." I love that. I'd love us to be like a model home, where people come in and say, "Oh, yeah, I want to be part of that neighborhood. I want to move in to that kind of house." It's a place where they get a picture of the Kingdom, the kind of neighborhood that Christ is building for eternity.

It will not be easy to have a culture here that is shaped by the gospel. It will not happen automatically. The biggest obstacle is me, myself and I. But the Holy Spirit is able to create the kind of church where the beauty and power of the gospel has so captured our hearts that we are living it out in ways that are making the name of Jesus Christ unignorable in the Fox Valley.

This is what I'm longing for. By God's grace, this is what I'm living for and preaching for and pastoring for here at New Covenant. I want the fame of the name of Jesus Christ to spread like wildfire throughout this community. I long for that. I love Isaiah 26:8 (NIV), where he says, "*Yes, Lord, walking in the way of your laws, we wait for you; your name and your renown are the desire of our souls.*" We're longing for His fame to be seen, for His name and renown to spread throughout the world.

What will it take for the name and the renown of Jesus Christ to spread through this community? It starts with what Romans 12:9-10 teaches us today: a community of people who love one another genuinely, sincerely and deeply. So let's read this together and get a vision of the kind of church that will make the name of Jesus unignorable, where people will notice Jesus

in our midst—the kind of church that will be living proof of the beauty and power of the gospel.

Romans 12:9-10:

<sup>9</sup> *Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.*

<sup>10</sup> *Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.*

Who wouldn't want to be part of a church like that? What I want us to do is make four commitments that each of us, by God's grace, will pursue in our life together. I want us to make these commitments so that if our children were to write a memoir 50 years from now about what they experienced growing up in a Christian home, and what they experienced growing up in this church, they would remember and comment on how much we loved one another. I want us to commit to living in such a way that our children will see that the gospel of Jesus is so beautiful and so powerful that it results in us loving one another in ways that the world cannot imitate.

I want to say that I believe my children have seen some of that growing up in our church. As a mom and dad, one of the things Kate and I have tried to be attentive to through the years is to point out evidences of grace in the church. We want our kids to observe how God's people love one another. We want them to be mindful of the ways in which God's people express God's grace in our life together.

We didn't want them to grow up in a home where they kind adopted the cynical attitude of their parents, where there was murmuring and grumbling and a sense that the church wasn't good enough. No, we were hoping to put the accent on how the Holy Spirit is working through God's people and the love that is shown among them. I am so thankful for all the ways my kids have seen the love of Christ through our church family.

So this isn't something I'm exhorting us to as if we don't have it. I'm exhorting us to this as Paul does to the Thessalonians, so that we would never take it for granted and would seek to excel more and more in love. Let's try to be like a fine restaurant that says, "There's nothing pre-cooked here. Only the freshest ingredients. No preservatives. Everything is prepared with love."

Romans 12:9-10 tell us how, if we have our eyes wide open to the mercies of God in Christ—as Paul reminds us in verse one—we will love one another in very specific ways. So here are four commitments to love the people of New Covenant in a way that reflects the gospel. If every one of us took these commitments seriously, our church would make the name of Jesus noticeable.

I'll give you all four, then we'll work through them.

1. I will not be fake.

2. I will let God's love define my love.
3. I will love my brothers and sisters in the faith as though they were brothers and sisters in blood.
4. I will honor my brothers and sisters above myself.

If we take these words seriously, if our eyes are wide open to God's mercies, I believe these are commitments we will want to make and that we will ask the Holy Spirit to work out in our lives.

### **1. I will not be fake.**

Verse nine, "*Let love be genuine.*" The NIV says, "*Love must be sincere.*" Paul uses the deepest, strongest word available to deal with love here. He uses the word *agape*. It's a word that was not used very much in common Greek of that day. It's a word that the biblical writers adopted to describe the unfathomable love that God has for His people, a love that is unlike any other love. It was a love that moved the Father to send His Son to go to the cross and die for us. That's *agape* love. It's God's kind of love.

Out of all the things Paul could have emphasized when he exhorts us to love one another with *agape* love, he starts with this: don't be a hypocrite with your love. Don't pretend. Don't be phony. Don't be nice and polite on the outside, while your heart is really consumed with yourself. The New Living Translation puts it like this: "*Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them.*" I like that.

So it's possible to talk in ways that sound loving and act in ways that look loving, but it's all phony. It's fake. It's insincere. We're focusing on ourselves. We're thinking, "How do I look in the eyes of others? How can I act so that people will think I'm spiritual? So that people think I'm loving or holy?" That's really what's going on in our thoughts, even as we're saying, "I love you."

In the "love chapter," 1 Corinthians 13:3 tells us, "*If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.*" So you could be very philanthropic, very generous, very sacrificial, but not really loving. The hypocritical heart is concerned about, "How do I look in the eyes of people?" This was rampant in Jesus' day. The religious leaders in His day gave to the needy in order to be praised by others. They prayed in public in order to be seen by others, but Jesus said, "That's all the reward you're going to get." Jesus detests this kind of hypocrisy. Nothing provokes more scathing words from the mouth of Jesus than the hypocritical "love" of the religious leaders of His day. He said to them:

*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence... Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. (Matthew 23:25, 27).*

So it's possible, friends, to put on a pretend, external kind of love that actually appears beautiful on the outside, but it's really a cover-up for a heart that is full of greed, self-indulgence and filth. That's hypocrisy. True love is not an act to get praise from men. It comes from a heart that's bathing in the love of God that He poured out in Jesus. Because we've been loved so lavishly and so undeservedly, we are moved to love others sacrificially for their good and for the glory of God. Love that is sincere aims for the good of others when it's motivated by the love God has shown to us and it's seeking to bring glory to God.

Paul says, "Make sure that's the kind of love you exhibit in the church. Don't be fake about this." Do we need to hear this exhortation? I think we do. I think especially in more conservative, traditional churches like ours, we can kind of develop a culture of niceness. Everyone is pleasant enough. But underneath the surface, if we're not guarding our hearts, there can be gossip, backbiting or prejudice.

Frederick Douglass, back in the 1840s, wrote a scathing critique of southern churches, that they would go to church and mouth these great words of piety, speaking gospel doctrine and believing the Bible, but then they would go home and beat their slaves and rape their women. The hypocrisy of it was disgusting.

We can develop a culture of niceness, but what we're really loving is our own privacy and independence. I think that's where we really have to watch out in 21st century Western suburbs. Oh, how we love our privacy. Oh, how we love our independence. Oh, how we guard our time. If we're not fighting against that, we can start gathering together to be with the church in just a superficial way. We can come and work the crowd, greet a few people, but never really open our hearts up to anyone, never really move toward anyone, never sacrificially love anyone. Paul is saying, "Don't let that happen. Let your love be genuine." Real love goes deep. Real love is a true expression of what's really in your heart. Real love is sincere."

So what if we all came to church praying in advance about, "Who will I talk to today? Who will I reach out to? Who will I actively move toward today in love? Not just the people I always talk to. Who is someone You want to lead me to who needs love today? Help me be sensitive to Your Spirit when I gather with Your people." What if we all prayed before we

gathered, “Lord, deliver me from just pretending I like my brothers and sisters. Help me to really love them today.” What if we came to church saying, “My love for my brothers and sisters in Christ will be like my Father’s love is to them. That’s how I want to love them, with the love of my Father.”

If we started coming with that kind of attitude, I think we’d start seeing repentance growing in our hearts. I think we’d recognize how much we need our hearts to be softened, how prone we are to avoid moving toward one another, how callous we can be, how—if the truth be told—we don’t always really care about other people. We naturally protect ourselves from getting close because we’re afraid of being hurt. If we really started coming to church saying, “I will not be fake. O God, make my love genuine and since,” that would have the effect of moving us closer to the cross, wouldn’t it?

What is the gospel? The gospel tells me God loves me—not because I’m worthy, not because I’m attractive. He loved me when I was very unattractive and drew near to me. When I was still His enemy, Jesus died for me (Romans 5:1-11). So if I’m refusing to love someone who is difficult, or if my heart is just cold and I don’t really care, do you know what is actually going on in my heart? I’m actually staying at a distance from the cross of Jesus. I’m actually losing sight of God’s mercies to me. I’m forgetting that I was so much more unattractive to God than anyone in my life is unattractive to me. Yet Jesus was tortured, humiliated and crucified for me when I was still His enemy.

Let’s talk about marriage for a minute. If you’re married, the person you’re called to love most passionately under God is your spouse. If you’re cold toward your spouse, constantly critical toward your spouse, trying to change your spouse to be what you want him or her to be, and if you’re withholding love from your spouse because he or she doesn’t meet up to your expectations—if that’s really what’s going on in your heart—when you say, “I love her” or “I love him,” you’re really just faking it, because your heart attitude toward him or her is not demonstrating love.

True love says, “I’m willing to lay down my life for you. I’m willing to die to my selfish agenda for you.” You can’t get close to the cross of Jesus and still be cold, harsh and critical, putting up a wall toward your spouse. You can’t bask in the blazing beams of Calvary and still be lukewarm and fake and unforgiving toward your brothers and sisters in Christ. You can’t get close to Jesus’ love for you on Calvary and still say, “I don’t really care that much for the rest of the family for whom You died, Lord Jesus.”

But if you realize, “Hey, I’ve been faking it. My heart is cold. I need Jesus to fill me with His love”, then you’re poised to experience real repentance and real renewal and real revival.

Because now you can get close to Jesus. You can ask Him, as you come to this communion table today, “Jesus, please show me how much You loved me when You died for me.” You can ask Him to renew you in His love and pour out His Spirit in your heart. “Please empower me, Lord, to love people deeply from my heart the way You have loved me.” As you do that, you’ll find your heart softening and your love becoming more tender and more sincere.

It’s so important that we think about this as we come to the communion Table. I believe one of the reasons communion can become dry, barren and ritualistic—where our hearts are not moved and our affections are not kindled—is because we’ve started to habitually live at a distance from the cross and Calvary’s love. You cannot hold on to a cold, unforgiving heart toward your brothers and sisters, pretending to be nice, but not really loving without backing away from the cross, without letting a chill settle over your love for Jesus.

Whenever we get closer to Calvary, we get more tightly knit to our brothers and sisters in Christ. The closer we get to Calvary, the harder it is to pretend and be fake, because the cross melts our hearts toward God and toward one another. “I will not be fake, Lord, by Your grace. Let my love be sincere and without hypocrisy.”

## **2. I will let God’s love define my love.**

What does the Bible say? God is love. The Bible does not say love is God. That’s important. It matters. What that means is we don’t really know what love is until we know Who God is. If we start with our idea of love and say, “Love is God”—as in God needs to conform to whatever I think love is—then we will distort love into something that actually becomes oppressive. Real love lets God’s will—which He has revealed about Himself in His Word—will define what is right and wrong, what is good and evil. Human love distorts this, like the song that says, “It can’t be wrong if it feels so right.” There are actually thousands of songs that say stuff like that.

Real love says, “God, I want my love to be defined and directed by Your moral will.” So look at what God’s Word says again in Romans 12:9. Just one breath after telling us to love sincerely, Paul also commands us to hate. “*Hate what is evil. Hold fast to what is good.*” That word there, “hate,” is a strong word. He’s saying, “Be horrified at what is evil. Abhor evil.” He’s not just saying, “Don’t do bad things, now. Be a good little Christian. Don’t do wrong things.” He’s not just saying, “Stay away from evil,” because it would be possible to stay away from doing evil things, while your heart really wants to do them, and while your imagination is filled with evil desires. If that’s what’s going on, you’re not abhorring evil. Paul is saying, “The very idea of evil

should be revolting to you. If God has been merciful to you and saved you in Christ, you should be revolted by the idea of evil. It should be unthinkable in your mind and in your imagination and in your thoughts and in your actions.”

Psalm 97:10 says, “*You who love the Lord, hate evil!*” You can’t love the Lord without hating what He hates. When you see God for Who He is—His holiness, His justice, His majesty, His power—then you hold on to God’s character like that, the effect it has on your heart is you hate the things that He hates. It’s like a song re sing here that states, “Only a holy God, there is none like You, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders...”

Paul is telling us that we have to be horrified by what God hates. When you look at God’s mercies He has poured out in Jesus, and when you look at the cross of Jesus where God’s holy love and holy justice met together and kissed one another, when you see how inflexible God’s hatred of evil is—that His very Son would die to bear the judgment for all the evil that’s in the world and in us—you realize God is not a God Who deals lightly with evil. Hate what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Cleave to it. Stick to it like glue; like two pieces of wood cemented together. True love says, “I want to be fastened so firmly to what is good in Your sight, God, that I cannot be separated from it.”

So what is Paul doing here? He’s saying, “Real love has to be combined with a passion for truth and a passion for holiness.” It’s not real love if it’s not combined with truth and holiness. This means that true love doesn’t just give the loved one what always feels good, or what the loved one might want emotionally. Parents, you know this. What happens when you’re so afraid of your kids’ anger and tears that you don’t discipline them? You always give them what they want. It’s a train wreck. And if you really love your friends, if you really love your brothers and sisters in Christ, there will be times when you might have to be tough, when you might have to confront, when you might have to risk the relationship, for a time, in order to stand against the deception or the lie or the sin that is threatening to destroy your loved one.

I want to ask you, friends, are you cultivating relationships that are built on loving what God loves and hating what God hates? Are you welcoming friendships into your life that are honest? Do you have friends within the body of believers who are so honest with you, and with whom you are so honest, that you bring the darkness that’s in your heart into the light with them? That’s what 1 John 1:7 says true fellowship looks like: “*But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.*”

So do you have friends to whom you confess your sins, fears, temptations, asking them to pray for you, to correct you, to help you, so that you will cleave to what is good and hate what is

evil? Are you committed to doing that for your brothers and sisters in Christ? Because, friends, I have to say: if we aren't seeking to practice that in our life together, you've got to wonder if we really believe what we say we believe when we confess our sins in church. We say we're sinners. We say we're engaged in a lifelong battle against indwelling sin. If that never factors into our relationships with one another, you've got to wonder: do we really believe that about ourselves? Or you've got to wonder: do we really love each other like we should? Real love cares about the truth and cares about holiness.

Tim Keller says this:

Any love that is afraid to confront the beloved is not really love, but a selfish desire to be loved. This kind of selfish love is afraid to do what is right (toward God and the beloved) if it risks losing the beloved's affection. It makes an idol out of the beloved. It says: 'I'll do anything to keep him or her loving me!' This is not loving the person. It is loving the love you get from the person... It is loving yourself more than the person.

True love says we are going to be committed, by God's grace, to helping one another hate what is evil and cling to what is good. It's to be that honest with one another, that genuine, that real. These are the kinds of relationships we need to be cultivating within the body of Christ. And it's not a judgmental thing. It's not so we can be harsh and condemning toward one another. It's so we can help each other grow in holiness, which is the way of joy.

### **3. I will love my brothers and sisters in the faith as though they were brothers and sisters in blood.**

This is what verse ten is calling us to: "*Love one another with brotherly affection.*" Be devoted to one another. There are two verbs in this verse that are speaking of a familial kind of love. It has the idea that we are going to be so doggedly committed to one another, it's like we're family. We're there for one another. We can count on each other. We've got each other's backs. And along with that rugged commitment, we're tenderly affectionate.

God is commanding through Paul that we feel a certain way toward our family in Christ. He's commanding that we feel brotherly affection for one another, which can't be faked. That's got to come from the Holy Spirit. So if it's lacking in our hearts, we've got to go to prayer and ask the Lord, "Would You please cultivate in me the kind of feelings that match up with what the gospel demands? Help me to love my brothers and sisters."

I have one brother and he's very different from the way I am. He is great with his hands. He's an excellent carpenter. He got a ten on that scale and I got a zero. So he got all the gifts I do not have. And our personalities are somewhat different. But one of the most precious gifts I got for Christmas was from my Uncle Jim and Aunt Jo Lynn, who took all the slides my Grandpa Gene had taken of our family. Not just the family when I was alive, but going back to the 1950s, with my dad and his siblings. They put that into a jump drive so we could look at them. Along with that, in the package, they put just a snapshot of my brother and me when we were about four years old.

Seeing that picture of my brother made wells of affection rise in my heart. Even though we're very different from one another, when we get together I see that the father and mother who love me—and have loved me since before I was born—also love him too. It makes me want to love him all the more, because we share the love of a father and a mother.

That's the way our love for each other in the body should be. We have a Father Who loves us. Oh, how patient He is with your sisters and your brothers in Christ—He knows their struggles, He's bearing with them, He's always coming alongside them. And the Father says to us, "Be tenderly affectionate toward one another the way I am toward you. Be doggedly committed to one another. Have each other's backs. Treat each other as if you're family—because you are. You are related through the blood of Jesus and will be forever."

One of the ways to test yourself is to ask, "Do I have for my brothers and sisters in Christ a deeper kind of affection, a deeper kind of understanding for them, than I do for my non-Christian relatives?" It should be that way. We share the same Father. We're going to live together forever. We are brothers and sisters through the blood of Jesus, so we love one another doggedly, committedly, ruggedly.

Let me give you an illustration. I know some of you have New England on your minds this Super Bowl Sunday. So let me give you a taste of what the original New England patriots went through during their first winter on American soil during the bitterly cold months of January and February 1620 and 1621, without houses or comforts, with scurvy and other diseases infecting them from their long voyage. They were dying—two or three a day—until only around 50 remained out of the 100 or so who had made the voyage.

Of those 50, during their time of deepest distress, only six or seven of them were healthy. William Bradford, recalling what these six or seven pilgrims did for the rest, wrote:

They spared no pains night nor day, but with abundance of toil and hazard of their own health, fetched them wood, made them fires, dressed them meat, made their beds, washed their loathsome

clothes, clothed and unclothed them—in a word, did all the homely and necessary offices for them which dainty and queasy stomachs cannot afford, cannot endure to hear named. And they did all this willingly and cheerfully, without any grudging in the least, showing herein their true love unto their friends and brothers—a rare example and worthy to be remembered.

That's what he means. Love one another with brotherly affection. Because when you were born again through faith in Jesus, you were not just born into a new life. You were born into a new family. Love your brothers as if they were brothers in blood. When you come to church, don't just be polite or formal. Go deeper than that. Ask the Spirit to make you not content with anything less than a tender, affectionate, warm-hearted love for all your brothers and all your sisters in Christ. And wherever it's lacking, you should be praying for it.

#### **4. I will honor my brothers and sisters in Christ above myself.**

Romans 12:10 states, "*Outdo one another in showing honor.*" Go first and lead the way in showing honor. Rather than competing for first place, promote one another. Don't just put up with one another. Don't just forgive one another. Don't just accept one another. Delight in honoring one another.

How do you do that? By seeing each other—not just as we are right now, but as we will be one day. One day we will be glorified. That's the climax of the gospel. I we could see what we will be like in the day when we see Jesus face to face, C.S. Lewis said we'd be tempted to fall down and worship one another, so great will be the glory. Now, don't go about doing that today. But honor Christ by honoring the work He is committed to do in your brothers and sisters, treating them as precious and highly esteemed. Prefer them above yourself.

One of my favorite verses in Psalm 16 is verse three: "*As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight.*" Can you say that? They're saints, chosen in Christ, so precious that He shed His own blood for them. They're not precious because of what they've done, but because of what He's done for them. They're not precious because of what they do for me. They're precious because of what they mean to Him. They're the saints; they are the excellent ones. I love how Ray Ortlund describes this:

There is so much to admire in every Christian. Just start asking questions. About 30 seconds into the conversation, the excellence will become obvious. Rather than rate them, grade them, scrutinize them to see if they are up at our level, rather than say, "Well, they aren't perfect"—which is condescending and irrelevant—rather than

point out their shortcomings, gospel eyes choose to observe and notice and talk about the many excellencies divinely invested in another Christian.

O Lord, give us those gospel eyes that notice the divine excellencies that You have invested in my fellow Christians, then help me take the next step. After seeing their excellencies, help me say, “In them is all my delight.” This is where it becomes real. I quote Ray Ortlund again:

This is personal. It’s emotional. It’s whole-hearted. It’s so bold that it might feel like borderline idolatry. All my delight is in her? But the gospel allows for no aloofness, no wait-and-see attitude, no stand-offishness. We move toward one another with intensely sincere joy. The world doesn’t think like this. We must—the gospel demands it. The Spirit empowers it.

If you’re taking Romans 12 seriously, if God’s mercies are in clear view, if your heart is warmed by the love Jesus has for you—the love that moved Him to die for you—you will not walk away from church today without saying, “Lord, there is someone I need to move toward today with intensely sincere joy. There’s someone You want me to write a letter to this week, or make a phone call to this week, or text to have coffee with this week. There’s someone You want me to encourage after this service today. Lord, show me who it is that I am to move toward with intensely sincere joy.”

If we live like this, who wouldn’t want to be part of New Covenant Bible Church? Who wouldn’t want to see what Jesus is doing in our midst? Who wouldn’t say, “Oh, Jesus must be real, that He can cause people to love one another like that”?

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## New Covenant Bible Church

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*All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.*

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