

The German philosopher Schopenhauer compared the human race to a bunch of porcupines huddling together on a cold winter's night. He said:

"The colder it gets outside, the more we huddle together for warmth; but the closer we get to one another, the more we hurt one another with our sharp quills. And in the lonely night of earth's winter eventually we begin to drift apart and wander out on our own and freeze to death in our loneliness."

You can probably guess why I quoted this German philosopher. Although he wrote about society as a whole... I think that it is a very apt description of the **church**. ... Anyone who lives their life to honor Christ... **will be** persecuted. Figuratively speaking – “it gets cold outside”... and members of the church need to huddle together to stay warm. ... **[P A U S E]** ... No believer should be alone when Satan opposes him/her. The church and corporate worship were instituted for this purpose.

But we are like a bunch of porcupines huddled together for warmth and safety... aren't we? And eventually someone moves the wrong way and a sharp quill digs into another... who was huddled for comfort. Sadly... in order to avoid the pain of getting pierced... some will drift away and end up freezing themselves – away from all the warmth and passion that they once had for Christ.

The thrust of today's passage in Romans is “How we are to draw together without wounding one another.” It isn't easy... and this is not a comfortable passage. It is going to ask us to do some difficult things... HOWEVER... we truly need each other! I need your spiritual gifts... and you need mine.

With Romans chapter 12... Paul has begun to write about the church. His words are not abstract theologizing. He is thinking of the people who make up the church... and his words have to do - first - with the humility that

allows each to assess himself with sober judgment. Next he moves on to the spiritual gifts that God has given to all members of the church... and that these must be exercised faithfully for the benefit of all. ... In today's passage... this line of thought continues. ... In Romans 12:9... the apostle moves from his discussion of spiritual gifts... to - how do we love those in the Church?

You see... one of the quills that jabs other believers... is a tendency to compare ourselves with other believers... on the basis of our spiritual gifting. "*Why wasn't I given a gifting like his/hers?*" ... Or... "*My gifting makes me more important than you...*" OR ... "*Sorry I cannot step in to meet that need because it is not my gifting...*" We start poking each other (with jealous attitudes... selfishness... and pride) on the basis of who got which gift ...and how successful someone else seems... in using their gift.

So each time spiritual gifting is taught in one of Paul's letters... immediately following it... there is a section about love. ... Why? ... Because spiritual gifts can be abused... if they are not exercised with love.

QUESTION: Have you ever noticed what follows I Corinthians 12 (where we find an extended discussion about spiritual gifts)...? ANSWER: I Corinthians 13! What is I Corinthians 13 known as? ANSWER: "the Great Love Chapter" of the Bible. ... And then following I Corinthians 13... Paul returns to the subject of spiritual gifts (in chapter 14) with warnings against specific abuses of spiritual gifts in Corinth... because love was not present with them.

Here in Romans... Paul does the same thing. Right after his discussion about Spiritual gifts in Romans 12... he launches into the needed

exhortation for love to be present. (Oh! And by the way... He does the same thing in Ephesians 4.)

So discussions about spiritual gifts go hand-in-hand with discussions about Christ-like love. Spiritual gifts can be **abused**... if they are not exercised with love. ... OR ... they (simply) **won't** be used at all – because believers who have been given spiritual gifts **will not love** fellow members of the church (enough) to discover and use them.

But before I launch into this necessary discussion... I want to say three things about what we will be reading. (Let's be real honest here.)

#1. Christian fellowship is much more than a pat on the back and a handshake. (I am going to say that again... and please feel free to say “amen” if you agree.) Christian fellowship is much more than a pat on the back and a handshake.

#2. Counterfeit love is a “worthless coin” in the kingdom of God. ... However... much of our lives is shot through with hypocrisy. Our culture encourages us to live an image. ... The media repeatedly presents us with people pretending to be something they are not... and so tempt us to take up masks ourselves... and to counterfeit a love we do not possess. ... Most of us can affect civilities (which appear to be utterly sincere... though they actually cover hostility) — like the smiling face we present to a police officer as he hands us a ticket... while inside we are saying: "*May all your days be filled with traffic jams!*"

We even deceive ourselves into thinking we have love for the people that we neglect and (in fact) do not even like. ... It is easy to act 'as if' loving someone by flattery... or by showing interest that is not genuine. But this

'playing-the-part-love' is really 'self-love' ... not 'others-love'. It is self-serving. Those who engage in 'hypocritical love' should stop. Most people aren't fooled for long... and it becomes a quill that stabs. ... In the end no one believes them about anything. ... But even sadder... those who 'pretend' to love... tend to lose touch with reality about themselves... since they are only 'actors' always 'playing a part'... and not real people.

#3. (and then we'll get to our passage...) ... The admonitions that we are about to read... are not a "law" in the sense of requirements we must fulfill to have God accept us. ... Paul is not smuggling-in a new law for God's approval through the back door. ... These admonitions are the response to God's grace... when we take it seriously enough to shape our life. This is how God is molding us... when we center our hearts and minds on the grace He has shown us.

So when we read these admonitions... and you feel a pang of guilt (which you will... if you are sensitive to the Holy Spirit)... use it as an honest examination of your heart... by means of this scriptural searchlight. As we go through these... ask yourself: "Do I show this kind of love to others in the church?" If the answer is uncertain... go to God in prayer... Tell Him you are sorry... ask Him to make you willing to love like this. (Ask Him to work on your wanters! ... Ask Him to motivate you.) ... Then ask the only One Who can (and is willing) to pour this kind of love into... and through... your heart to others. ... [P A U S E] ...

Now... our passage falls into two separate portions: verse 9 (which introduces the subject of love in a general way)... and verses 10-13 (which show how genuine love is to function.)

Romans 12:9

The word for "love" here is *agape*... which... to this point... had been used in Romans only for **divine** love (Romans 5:5; 8:35-39)... except in 8:28 where it is used for man's love for God. ...But here the word is used to indicate the kind of love Christians are to show *to others* — a Godlike love! (Think about what kind of a love this is.) ... It is a love that loves regardless of the circumstances... a deliberate love that decides it will keep loving even if it is rebuffed. ... We are challenged to live out the **highest** love and to do so with the highest sincerity. ... Our love is to be genuine... not counterfeit.

In the Greek text the word translated *genuine* is *anupokritos*... the latter part of which has given us the word *hypocritical*. *Anupokritos* means without a mask... and it refers to the way in which (in the Greek theater) actors would carry tragic... comic... or melodramatic masks... to signal the role they were playing.

When Paul tells us that love is to be ("not") hypocritical... he is saying that those who love are not to play a role... but rather are to be genuine. ... In other words... we are to get off the stage and drop our masks.

As I indicated earlier... most of us have learned how to be courteous to others — how to speak kindly... avoid hurting their feelings... and appear to take an interest in them. ... We may even be skilled in pretending to show compassion when we hear of others' needs... or to become indignant when we learn of injustice. ... But God calls us to a real and genuine love

that goes far beyond being hypocritical and polite. ... Genuine love requires concentration and effort. It means helping others become better people.

Counterfeit love is a "worthless coin" in the kingdom of God.

The Greek words for *hate* and *cling* in verse 9 are actually participles linked to the words "*let love be genuine.*" So the sentence actually reads, "*Let love be genuine... by hating what is evil and clinging to what is good.*" It is both genuine and discriminating.

First, love; then hate! The two seem incompatible to most of us. But they are not... and their juxtaposition in this verse teaches an important truth.

Love must be discriminating! When God loves through us... it is not a sentimental mush that just loves everything. ... On the contrary... it hates what is evil and clings to what is good.

The believer is to love by hating evil. The word "abhor" (*a-pos-tu-goun-tes*) is strong... (very strong!) ... It means to hate with intense feeling... to look upon with *horror*. ... Love desires the very best for people. Therefore... love hates evil... because it devastates human life. The point is that the believer shows love... by hating and fighting against situations that are evil.

If we are to love the way that God loves... then there will be things for us to hate. We can know what things God hates... because He tells us in His Word. Here is what we should hate too...

Proverbs 6:16-19 (ESV)

¹⁶ *There are six things that the LORD hates, seven that are an abomination to him: ¹⁷ haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, ¹⁸ a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that*

make haste to run to evil, ¹⁹ a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers.

In Matthew 18... the church is asked to carry out restorative discipline as an act of love. Where such evil exists in the church... as any of these things that God hates... (such as unrepented pride... and unrepented sowing discord among brothers)... we are to go to the person in a step-by-step careful process. Unfortunately... (even when Christ's instructions in Matthew 18 are carefully followed) some church members misunderstand what a "Godly love" is. They don't realize that "love hates evil because it devastates human life."

Christian fellowship is much more than a pat on the back and a handshake.

Our love is to be genuine by hating what is evil and holding fast to what is good. The word for "*holding fast*" means to stick like adhesive tape... to be welded... or cemented together with the good things. The believer should always be identified with good things... rather than shady or questionable practices. ... **[P A U S E]** ...

Verse nine has described love - generally. ... What (now) follows is a description of how it is to operate with total sincerity... in nine areas.

Romans 12:10-13

(Now I am going to say something to you who are grammar enthusiasts. Those of you who aren't... bear with me. This will only take less than a minute...)

In the Greek text... verses 10-13 contain nine clauses... each that begin with nouns in the dative case. Each noun comes first in its clause for

emphasis. These nouns in the dative case... have the meaning of: “as regards to...” or “with respect to...” For example... verse 10 literally reads: “as regards to brotherly love - being devoted to one another”... and ... “as regards to honor - outdoing one another...” and so forth.

(Now) here is why I went into the weeds of grammar and mentioned all this “dative case” stuff. ... (Being written this way)... Paul is being careful to show us that all nine of these clauses are defining a “love that is genuine.” When our love is **genuine** we will be doing these things without hypocrisy.

Romans 12:10a

Paul appears to make up a word here. (φιλοστοργοι) We don't see this word used anywhere else. It combines two different Greek words for love. Filas... which means “brotherly love” and storgai... which means “kind affection.” ... He combines the words for friendship love and family love. So the idea expressed here is: "Be devoted with warm family affection to one another in brotherly love."

Christian fellowship is much more than a pat on the back and a handshake.

Paul is really straining himself. He goes out of his way to write: "*in respect to the love of our Christian brothers and sisters, we are to be marked by a devotion that is characteristic of a loving, close-knit, and mutually supportive family.*" This kind of love allows for weaknesses and imperfections... communicates... deals with problems... affirms others... and has a strong commitment and loyalty to others. ... Such love involves commitment like that experienced in **good** families. (You know... the kind that we always see on TV. They work out the most serious and complex

issues in a half-hour.) Well... maybe not in such a contrived (superficial) manner... Remember we are to do it without any hypocrisy.

Our love is to be characterized by the warm affection shared between members of a family. But, truth be told, family members can be especially difficult to love! ...And so can church members!

Perhaps you have heard this little ditty before:

To dwell above, with saints in love,

That will indeed be glory;

To dwell below with saints we know,

Well, that's a different story! ... [P A U S E] ...

"My friend" writes J. Vernon McGee, "you ought to be nicer to your fellow believer because you will have to live with him throughout eternity." ... The truth is that we have a family bond that cannot be broken. So love with the warm affection of the most committed and best family you could ever imagine.

Romans 12:10b

A good translation might be: "*And in respect to honor, lead the way for each another.*" In other words: "*Don't wait around for people to recognize your contributions and praise you. Instead, be alert to what they are contributing and honor them.*" This is how true love functions. It gets to the front of the line - *not to receive its own honors*... but to show honor and respect for other people.

Giving genuine honor will never be flattery. How do we know if it is flattery...? Flattery invests a temporary preference into another person's

life – with a view of getting something back. It is done as quid-pro-quo (I will honor you now... and expect you to honor me in the future.)

Honoring someone with love that is genuine... begins with a willingness to let another have his or her preference in nonessential matters. We are to listen when someone speaks and give his or her words careful consideration. We must allow others to differ from us... respecting their opinions even though we disagree. We are to treat another person's feelings with care and respect... demonstrating gratitude for one another...
WHETHER OR NOT THEY DO THE SAME FOR US!

How different this from the spirit of the world. That spirit seeks not to confer honor... but to obtain it... It aims not to dispense respect... but to attract all others to give honor to us. ... If this single direction were obeyed it would give order and beauty to the church.

Unfortunately... if we look at the church in today's culture... far too often we must conclude that the exact opposite is frequently the case. ... Many are hurt —and many have launched out to stir up trouble — because “hurt people – hurt people.” How sad that so much divisiveness has been caused because a brother or sister was... overlooked... not honored...not esteemed... not thanked... not recognized... not given a position... not given a right... not given a place... not shown appreciation. ... Churches have been split. ... Valuable causes have been set back for generations

Romans 12:11a

"In regard to what you ought to be doing - boiling." This is directed against weariness in well-doing (just as Gal. 6:9 does.) This can be a real

problem... when trying to live the Christian life for any length of time. It is easy to get discouraged. It is hard to keep on steadily. Christians must fight against discouragement... depression... and negativeness. They must do their utmost to keep their spiritual temperature high.

“Boiling”...? ... Yes. I am going to give you another Greek word here. I love this... and what it depicts! (τησπουδη) “Be τησπουδη in spirit!” It means to boil over. *"In respect to the spirit - boiling."*

Unfortunately... since boiling suggests heat and we think of heat as having to do with anger... it would be better to think of this as a Christian ***"bubbling over."*** This enthusiasm is characterized by active optimism and energetic zeal that cannot be contained; it's the very opposite of lethargy and indifference. ... (LISTEN!) ... Everyone wants to be loved ***enthusiastically*** and ***passionately*** - not passively or out of obligation. ... But please note: this does not happen apart from the Holy Spirit. (Here is an aspect of love where fakeness can be a BIG temptation.) ... Let the Holy Spirit bubble over in your spirit as you serve Christ. Ask Him for it... if it is missing. (*"Give me some of that τησπουδη in my spirit, Lord!"*)

Romans 12:12

Verse 12 introduces three more items which also go together. *"In so far as we have cause to hope - let us be joyful... in so far as we have cause of pain - let us hold out... and in so far as the door of prayer is open to us - let us continue to use it."*

Praise – patience – hope! How do we remain patient through tribulation? We continue to hope... anticipating that which has not yet happened and

celebrating as though it has. We continue to fulfill our obligations and enjoy our blessings even when we're discouraged and want to quit. And all the while... we devote ourselves to prayer.

Even in trials... we can look forward with happy anticipation to all that God is planning for us. When we face trouble or persecution... we can be patient... knowing that God is in control. ... The believer knows that God will do one of two things: either **1.** *remove* the trial or **2.** deliver him *through* the trial.

Let me give you J. Vernon McGee's take on this:

The circumstances of the believer may not warrant rejoicing. The contrary may be true. But he sees the future, and in hope projects himself into other circumstances which are more favorable. I think of a brother down in my Southland years ago. In a church service they were giving favorite Scripture verses. He stood and said that his favorite verse was "It came to pass." Everyone looked puzzled. The preacher stood up and said, "Brother, how in the world can 'It came to pass' be your favorite?" His answer was, "When I have trouble, and when I have problems, I like to read that verse, 'It came to pass,' and I know that my trouble or my problem has come to pass; it hasn't come to stay." He was looking for a new day out there, and that is what Paul has in mind when he says, "rejoicing in hope."

Very simply... the believer overcomes trials by giving constant attention to God and waiting upon His delivering power. The believer stays in constant communion with his Lord... through continued prayer... depending upon Him to supply the strength to walk through the trials of daily living.

Constant in prayer is an interesting clause. Paul says *constant (or continuing)* because he was aware that *this is just the problem*. (You see) It

is not that we never pray. But we get tired of praying... our minds wander... and we neglect prayer precisely when we most need it.

Do you remember Jesus' teaching about prayer in Luke 11? ... After he had given the Lord's Prayer... Jesus told about a man who knocked on a neighbor's door late at night because a friend had come and he had nothing to give him... and although the neighbor did not want to get out of bed to help... eventually he did because of the man's persistence. ... To maintain a joyful hope... and to be sustained in the midst of afflictions... it is necessary to cherish a spirit of prayer... (or simply... to live near to God.)

Praise! Patience! Prayer! The Christian has an anchor for the future. It is hope - hope as bright as the promises of God. ... Prayer keeps that hope alive! ... Is prayer your steering wheel... or your spare tire...?

Romans 12:13

"In regard to the need of the saints, participating, practicing hospitality."

This means that Paul is not just talking about giving money to poor Christians. In fact... he is not thinking about money specifically at all. He is thinking about the needs of Christians and about identifying with them in those needs. If a person is mourning... we should identify with him in his sorrow and give what comfort we can. ... If another is lonely or abandoned... we should be company for her to the degree we are able. ... But we should give to the financial needs of impoverished people, too.

Notice that it says "seek to show hospitality." The word means "pursue"... "chase." It often denotes a strenuous pursuit. The idea (here) is that the

loving believer does not wait for the stranger to show up on the doorstep... but goes out and gets him.

Christian hospitality differs from social entertaining. Entertaining focuses on the host: The home must be spotless... the food must be well prepared and abundant... the host must appear relaxed and good-natured. ...

Hospitality... (by contrast)... focuses on the guests' needs... such as a place to stay... nourishing food... a listening ear... or just acceptance.

Hospitality can happen in a messy home. It can happen around a dinner table where the main dish is canned soup. It can even happen while the host and the guest are doing chores together. Don't hesitate to offer hospitality just because you are too tired... too busy... or not wealthy enough to entertain.

... ..

I do not know how anything can be more practical than this. ... My fellow porcupine! We can huddle together... if we love one another... honor one another... enthusiastically serve one another... pray for one another... and meet one another's needs... as God loves other porcupines through us.

... [P A U S E] ...

Imagine if you were told that everything you wanted most in life could be yours if you could scale this one mountain. You got in shape... gained strength... spent a lot of money to buy climbing gear... underwent years of specialized training... until finally... you climbed that mountain. It was tormenting... but you made it!

And then... when you got to the top... a guide told you: “*Oops. You climbed the wrong mountain!*”

That’s essentially the message that I think far too many of us will hear at the end of our lives. We’ll have given ourselves over to lesser pursuits than allowing God’s love to flow through us to fellow believers. And will enter heaven with great joy for what’s before us... but great regret for what we’ve left behind.