

Love One Another with Tender Affection

[Romans 12:9–13](#)

[Life Together](#)

Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer.

Tender Affection

We have spoken about loving our neighbor as we love ourselves—making our self-seeking the measure of our self-giving. Taking our skin off and wrapping it around another person and seeing ourselves in them with all our longings and needs and desires. And we have talked about loving our enemies, praying for our persecutors, blessing those who curse us, returning good for evil.

Today we penetrate further into the relational experience that God intends for his people. He intends for us not merely to do to others as we would have them do to us, but he wants us to feel toward other believers a certain way. It is true that love is more than feelings. It is true that there are good ways we should treat each other even when we are feeling upset with one another. But it is not true to say that God is content with our treating each other decently while feeling hard toward each other.

[Romans 12:9–10](#)

Let's look at the Scriptures that show us this. Start in our text, [Romans 12:9–10](#),

Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. 10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor.

Ponder that sentence, "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love." "Be devoted to one another," doesn't quite get the sense of the original. The RSV says, "Love one another with brotherly affection." But the word for "love" or "be devoted" refers to a special kind of love. It's used only here in the whole New Testament. But it is not a rare word outside the New Testament. It refers to "tender affection, particularly family affection" (C.E.B. Cranfield, Romans, vol. 2, p. 632). So what the verse is calling for is that Christians have "tender affection toward each other in family love."

In C.S. Lewis' book, *The Four Loves*, he says there are four basic kinds of love. He gives them their Greek names: agape—the God-like self-giving love even toward enemies; philia—the love of friendship and camaraderie; eros—the love of romance and desire and sexual attraction; and storge—the love of affection that arises through natural attachment, a child, a dog, a favorite old shabby sweater, a spot in the woods.

The word in [Romans 12:10](#) is a form of this last word, storge. To be specific, it is philostorgos—tender affection, especially toward precious family members. But the key new element here for us is this affectionateness. This is what I want to focus on today.

The command for believers to love each other in the New Testament—the command for how we are to relate to each other in the body of Christ—is not merely that we bless those who curse or that we return good for evil, or that we pray for those who treat us badly or that we do unto others as we want

them to do to us. There is more to this command. We are to feel an affection, a tender affection for each other.

[1 Peter 1:22](#)

Before we think about the implications of this, let's look at several other texts which point in the same direction. For example [1 Peter 1:22](#),

Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart.

Here again is something much more than treating each other well. Here is something from the heart. Something earnest, something with fervor. Something of family affection.

[Philippians 1:8](#) and [2 Corinthians 6:11–13](#)

In [Philippians 1:8](#) Paul says to the church,

For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.

The word for "affection" is "intestines" or "inner organs." The idea is: I long for you and love you not just with an act of will power but with deep and tender affections. I miss you. I am homesick for you. I feel. In [2 Corinthians 6:11–13](#) he calls for the church to share this kind of love:

Our mouth has spoken freely to you, O Corinthians, our heart is opened wide. 12 You are not restrained by us, but you are restrained in your own affections. 13 Now in a like exchange—I speak as to children—open wide to us also.

This is the command of love among believers: wide hearts open to each other, not cramped, narrow affections.

"Greet One Another with a Holy Kiss of Love"

Another pointer to this kind of love among Christians is the fact that five times in the New Testament Christians are told to "Greet one another with a [holy] kiss of love" ([1 Peter 5:14](#); [1 Thessalonians 5:26](#); [2 Corinthians 13:12](#); [1 Corinthians 16:20](#); [Romans 16:16](#)). This raises the question whether our cultural handshake really carries what Christ means for us to feel for each other.

So I conclude that it is the will of God for his children not just to do good things for each other, and not just to pray for each other or speak decently of each other—those are crucial and demand the power of the Holy Spirit to accomplish. But God's will is for more: "Love each other with brotherly affection." "Open your hearts wide to each other." "Feel for each other a kind of tender affection and longing that would naturally be expressed in a holy kiss of love."

Beware!

Now beware of being controlled by a popular theology at this point. There is a popular way of looking at God and our own wills and emotions that says: God will not command of us what we don't have immediate moral power to perform. And since we cannot by an act of will start feeling affection for someone, God would not require this of us. It is amazing how many people are consciously and unconsciously controlled by that view of things. We read a command like, "Love one another with

tender affection," and, without even thinking, we excuse ourselves on the basis of the fact that we cannot at this moment produce by an act of will such tender affection. Therefore we conclude it cannot be a real command, and we are not guilty if we don't have the affection because we are not really responsible for the spontaneous affections and emotions of our hearts.

God Commands What We Ought to Feel

This way of thinking happens so fast, that it is scarcely noticed. We just keep on reading. I urge you to stop right now and reconsider. Very seriously. This is a deeply defective way of seeing God and of understanding your own emotions. The truth is that God does have a right to command that we feel anything we ought to feel. If we ought to feel joy in the Lord, he commands, "Rejoice in the Lord" ([Philippians 4:4](#)). If we ought to feel the sorrow of sympathy, he commands, "Weep with those who weep" ([Romans 12:15](#)). If we ought to feel gratitude for a great gift, he commands, "Be thankful" ([Colossians 3:15](#)). If we should feel remorse for our sin, he commands, "Be miserable and mourn and weep" ([James 4:9](#)). If we should feel fear of sin, he commands, "Fear the one who after he has killed has the power to cast into hell" ([Luke 12:5](#)). And so on.

The fact that our hearts are so distorted by sin that we don't feel what we ought to feel does not mean that God cannot command what is right and good and fitting for us to feel. We are responsible to feel what God commands us to feel. So I plead with you, be more serious when you read these commands than you might be if you thought God has no right to tell you what you should feel toward others, and that you have no accountability for your emotions.

Why Is This So Important?

Now why is this so important? It's important because tender family affection among believers witnesses to the truth that God is our Father. The church is not primarily a human organization. It is primarily the family of God. To be a Christian means that you were born a second time into the family of God. You were born the first time into a human family. You were born the second time into God's family.

These are not mere words. They are spectacular realities. God takes very seriously the truth that all his children are brothers and sisters. They all have one Father, one homeland. And God says, there is a way that my children should feel about each other. Not just act toward each other, but feel about each other. They are to be tenderly affectionate toward each other. Why? Because this testifies to the reality of the family of God. To feel hard toward each other, to feel indifferent or narrow, not to mention bitter and resentful, toward each other, contradicts who God is and who we are. God is our father and we are his children and we are brothers and sisters in one family with the deepest common values in the universe.

So this issue of how we feel toward each other is very important. The issue is whether we will live the truth of God's Fatherhood or not. Will our affections tell the truth about God and what he has done for us to atone for our sins in Jesus and give us new birth and faith and adopt us into his eternal family as brothers and sisters of Christ? This is not a small issue. It's an issue about the truth of Christianity. Will we tell the truth the way God calls us to: "Love one another with tender family affection"?

What If I Don't Feel This Tender Affection?

But if it is so important and yet so hard, how shall we respond? Suppose you hear the command of Jesus this morning: Love the brothers and sisters at Bethlehem with tender affection. Open your heart wide to them. Feel a longing for them and joy in them. And suppose you can think of several people that you do not feel that way about. They have gossiped about you or snubbed you or let you down.

And you say, "I hear you Lord. And I submit to the rightness of your command. But you see me through and through. I do not feel affection for him. My battle is just trying not to hate. But I yield. You have right to call me to this. I embrace the goodness and the authority of your call. I want to obey." Now what do you do?

1. Pray for the Spirit's Power

First, pray earnestly that God, the Holy Spirit would move in power on your heart and work the miracle that neither you nor I can work on our own. We are talking about supernatural living here. Pray that God would change your heart toward his other children—that he would create new affections, or awaken old ones.

2. Focus on the Heavenly Reality and God's Mercies

Second, keep your eyes focused on the heavenly reality not the earthly frustration. We tend to focus almost exclusively on the ways we have been hurt or disappointed. That will defeat us every time. There is a greater reality to think about and focus on, but you must make an effort. Focus on the reality of God's Fatherhood. When you think about a Christian that is hard to feel affection for, say, "God is her Father. God is his Father." When you see her, think, "God is her father." Then say, "And God is my Father. We have the same Father. Jesus is her Savior and my Savior. The same blood bought her as bought me. The same Holy Spirit indwells her as indwells me. The same love flows from God toward her that flows toward me. She is my sister. He is my brother. We will live forever in the same family. We will live forever together in joy and ecstasy in the presence of our Father on the new earth."

Preach to yourself these things. "You will know the truth and the TRUTH will set you free" from many defective emotions. Don't keep feeding those defective emotions with mere earthly thoughts about how you were wronged and how you were let down. God knows that. God will take care of that. He'll settle that account. Set your minds on the great realities that make you a Christian.

At the beginning of this chapter ([Romans 12:1-2](#)) Paul gave the key to how all these impossible commands are to be fulfilled.

I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

We must be transformed by the renewal of our minds. You can't love Christians with tender affections in your old way of thinking and feeling. There must be a transformation. How? "I beseech you, by the mercies of God." Focus on the mercies of God. Focus on realities of heaven and eternity. Stop being conformed to this age and thinking only the way the world thinks when they are hurt and disappointed. They only think about their hurt and how bad the other person is for hurting them. But you are to be transformed, not conformed to this earthly way of thinking. Set your mind on the great realities that make you a Christian. Set your mind on God. He is my Father. He is her father. He is our Father. And we will be with our Father forever. We cannot go on in animosity. It is too big a lie about God.

3. Remember Christian Love Is a Growing Thing

Third, keep in mind that Christian love is not an all or nothing thing, but a growing thing. In [2 Thessalonians 1:3](#) Paul commends the Christians like this,

Your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater.

Love is a growing thing. So you may have some of it and be a real Christian and not have enough of it. You may feel some affection toward a fellow believer, but also wrestle with other negative emotions. That does not mean you are not a Christian, or that God is not pleased with you. It means that you have been touched by the Spirit of your Father and he is touching you again now and saying, "There is another step to take. There is another level of love to move on to. Move now. Let the word of my imperfect servant, Pastor John, move you, as I am moving him, to go on to more affection for more of your brothers and sisters. Don't give up because of a false all-or-nothing mentality that does not recognize the new things God has really begun to work in you."

4. Don't Be a Relational Fatalist

Fourth, do not be a relational fatalist. What I mean by that is the feeling that it's hopeless, and you could never change. You may say, "I don't feel affection for anybody. Our family did not feel or show affection." Well God did not say, "Do this, if your family did it." Or: "Feel, if your family felt." He knows your weakness and your woundedness. The angel Gabriel came to Mary and told her that as a virgin she would get pregnant with the Son of God. She balked, like you may be balking now—that God might birth in you affection for God's people. But he said, "Nothing will be impossible with God." Do not be a fatalist. Do not deny the power of God in your life.

Conclusion: An Analogy

Consider in closing the analogy in marriage. Do you think that married couples always feel tender affection for each other? Always feel tender and warm? They don't. But such affection is the ideal. That is what God calls us to. And one of the reasons he makes marriage unbreakable and seals it with an oath, "For better or for worse, till death do us part," is because he knows that we need to live our lives in the circle of rugged commitment where feelings of absolute hopelessness that affection could ever be awakened again can indeed be overcome and true, new tender affections revived. I know that it can happen. It has happened.

That is not only true in marriage. It is true in the church. I call you to it. Let's pursue it together. Let's pray this summer and set our minds on the great reality of God's Fatherhood over us all and grow into a family of believers that loves each other with tender affection