

Believers Growing Believers (Romans 12:9-13)

Please stand with me for the reading of God's Word: [Read Romans 12:9-13]

Join me in prayer:

Most high and almighty God, you are greatly to be praised. We are unable to grasp your infinite beauty, power, wisdom, graciousness, and perfect truth. Yet you have condescended to us, through your Son, who made satisfaction for all who believe. Through your Holy Scriptures, which makes us wise for salvation. Through your Holy Spirit, who indwells the saints to grow in holiness. May you grow us more and more. Give us knowledge, give us wisdom, give us zeal, and give us hearts that seek after you alone. May we see your goodness on display as we become more and more like your son, Jesus, the Christ, our Lord. We pray, asking all of this, in his name. Amen.
(Tell the congregation to, please, be seated)

When I had you stand for the reading of God's Word, pray with me, and then to sit, those directions are known as *imperatives*. They're something that is asked, or commanded, to give direction (or take action). We train animals, like dogs for example, to follow them. "Sit", "stay", "come", "no". But we also teach others, like children, to obey as well. "Brush your teeth." "Put your socks in the laundry basket." "Stop hitting your brothers." The Bible is also filled with imperatives.

I would wager, if I were a betting man, that most people who know about the Bible think about imperatives first. Commands like "you shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal." Commands like those, which prohibit you from doing wrong. Or, you'll hear sermons where the preacher reminds you to honour your parents, or the government, or telling you to live at peace with one another. It's easy to see why the "what you should do" kind of messages are popular. We are, after all, a self-help society. It's attractive to listen to sermons with titles like "How to Get Right with God," "How to be a Better Parent," or "5 Steps to Curing Anxiety." We are a people who are oriented towards wanting to grow.

Now, don't get me wrong, all these are good things. They're from Scripture. They're important to obey. But the challenge with imperatives is that they don't teach us the "why". Imperatives aren't built to give you information. They're meant to give you instructions.

I've heard an acronym of the word BIBLE that many people resonate with: Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth. Though clever, it reduces the Bible to a list of imperatives. But we also need the "why" behind the commands. We need *indicatives*.

Indicatives are the "why" and the "what" that we need. An indicative is something that has been told to you for your information. They're like a diagnosis from your doctor. Let's say you go to the doctor, you notice you've been having trouble sleeping. You decide to go and get this problem checked out. Your doctor could then ask you a series of questions, maybe run some tests, or evaluate your circumstances. Eventually, your doctor figures out what your problem is and gives you your diagnosis. An indicative is like a diagnosis. It teaches you where you're at.

Once you get your indicative (your diagnosis), you can then receive your imperative (your prescription, whatever it may be. Exercise, medication, whatever they may give you) in order to get better. For effective healthy living, we need to *know* if and when something is wrong, and we need *directions* to live better.

In our Christian walk, we hope to become more like Christ. We want to grow in our sanctification (the process of growing into holiness). We're concluding our sermon series, Growing together, with an appeal to be sanctified among the saints. This morning, we'll be looking at the biggest list of commands Paul puts together. And this is a list of commands aimed at the church, for the church. As you may have noticed, this entire text is a big line of imperatives. Thirteen, in fact. Thirteen imperatives. These are the things we must do, brothers and sisters, to thrive and be sanctified.

So how do you start preaching a big ol' list of imperatives? We ground it in the gospel! Why? Because the Gospel IS our why! Our faith is founded on the greatest indicative the world has ever known: Though once sinners, we have been saved! Friends here today who have not been saved, let me appeal to you: We, the church here at Calvary Baptist, have been aware of our sins and saw we deserved justice to come swiftly upon us. Each of us in our own ways sin and dishonour God. It could be by the lack of self-control and gluttony, or our secret thoughts that dishonour others. Or while standing by, letting evil take place before our eyes. Whatever way we failed, we recognized our sorry state: Unrighteous. We are all unrighteous. But what we have found is great news and joyful hope: God sent his Son into the world, as a great act of love, to save us. And if you have not received this great love for yourself, you can receive that today. Right now! You can put your hope, your faith, in Jesus Christ the righteous one of God who paid the price for sin.

It is the greatest offering of love the world was granted. It was love without selfish gain. God doesn't get something more powerful or better for doing this. He did it purely out of sincere, genuine, love. And I'm certain that love is offered to you. Talk with me, or the person who brought you to church this morning, if you feel that love from God appeal to your heart. May you be filled with the Holy Spirit, and find great hope in our God of life.

That love that was first given to us is exactly the grounds for the first command in the text today. And though I don't intend to have a bunch of sermon points on the screen for you today, I think I can sum up the message of the text in one sentence for you this morning: **Let your love for God drive you to love one another.**

This message is for the saints, to the saints. **Let your love for God drive you to love one another.** The text following this section is for how we, church, love those outside the church. But this text is for how you can love your church family.

And what better way to start than by making a command that parallels, exactly, what we first see in the gospel: “**Let love be genuine.**” The word in Greek here gives the sense of being *unlike an actor*. Actors, as you know, play pretend professionally. They assume a false identity, and operate like someone they’re not. They play a part and deliver what the story needs them to deliver. Like Shakespeare, where someone plays the part of the fiery Tybalt, or the lovestruck Juliette. Or assuming roles on the big screen, where Jim Carrey plays the Grinch, or Jimmy Stewart plays George Bailey. What they say isn’t necessarily reflected in who they are, but who they are pretending to be.

Genuine love is marked by not being like that. It’s a love that’s sincere all the way into the depths of your inner soul. Do you have a heart that loves like that? A love that was first given to us from Christ, who loved us without reservation? Love from a Father who made us in his image and made us to be in fellowship with him? Love that extends beyond your class or ethnicity? That’s the picture of the church. That’s a picture of us, Calvary. We are, here at this very church, a people who come from all tribes, tongues, and nations. Church members who share nothing about our lives *but that we are Christ’s, and Christ is ours*. Together. Brothers and sisters always have a common connection because we have the one who genuinely loves us, and we get to fellowship with those who God saved. Those who have more in common than anything that hobbies, childhoods, or experiences could ever bond together.

That common love contrasts the world that we live in. A world filled with sin. With brokenness. With shame and guilt. Dishonour and chaos. So our text has two more commands,

“Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.” These two commands help us frame what genuine love is. They help us live out our faith in a world that doesn’t see as we see.

In our world, and even in Canada, and I love our country for the record, but in our world, we aren’t a world that loves good. Scripture reminds us of that. Romans 1, which is the foundation for Romans 12 teaches us this. “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.” Those who have not been regenerated by the Holy Spirit and covered by the blood of Christ are in the world. And Ephesians 2 tells us we walked in the way of Satan.

You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.

So when we hear stories, even this month, where some Canadian politicians are seeking to legislate the ability to ask for MAiD in advanced. And when paired with stories where a Dutch doctor, against her patient’s wishes, killed her patient who said she didn’t want to be euthanized, by having her family hold the woman down to administer death. The doctor said, “I believed that her suffering was truly awful” She encouraged her patient that she could help her die. Then when the woman said “that’s going a bit far,” she said to reporters, “I saw in her eyes that she didn’t understand it anymore.” This doctor was not found guilty.

I know that’s a graphic picture, but that’s our world today. We *celebrate* death and reject life, even when people are begging for their lives. I hope that made you uncomfortable, as it made me. Abhor what is evil. Truly, I hope you find wickedness to be reprehensible. We should have disgust that we have a world that celebrates the death of children “for the sake of the mothers.” We love and celebrate moms, and children. Mothers are the very people who bring life into our world. 1 Timothy 2 reminds us of the beauty of childbirth. “She will be saved through childbearing.” God designed it like that. They are the bringers of life, and one mother

brought the God of life into our world. That's the ultimate way that women are saved through childbearing. The gospel brings forth life, Jesus brought forth life, Mary brought forth life, mothers bring forth life. **Hold fast to what is good.**

I really like the picture of what it means to hold fast to what is good. The Greek text could be rendered with this picture, "**glue yourselves to goodness**" We should not only seek out what is good, but we should cleave ourselves to what is upright. We should fuse ourselves into holiness. When we see what is truly righteous, we should seek to become sanctified to that. We see God is life, so we should yearn to celebrate life and promote life and protect life.

Life is good, sacred, and precious. Yet our culture tells us to reverse the gospel. Instead of the life-giving message that Jesus died, laying down his life for us, that we may receive life... Culture demands us to kill our children so we can take our lives back, and live our best lives now. How backwards? It's an anti-gospel. It's a call for us to do the opposite of God. Church, **abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.**

How can we have genuine love among the saints? Our text continues to expand on what it means to **Let your love for God drive you to love one another**. When we learn to hate evil, and devote ourselves to good, it builds into a celebration of God's community. Our text says, in verse 10, "**Love one another with brotherly affection.**" Here, we are commanded to love brothers and sisters *as* brothers and sisters. And we should do it with measured consideration. One could say, "**devote yourselves to one another with devotional love.**" Paul encourages his readers to spur themselves on to seek the good of each other. Consider what it means to wholeheartedly give yourself to the cause of caring for the saints. What would church look like if you gave your all to contribute to the needs of your brothers and sisters? [Pause]

Of course, we are limited, and we have our families to care for. Don't neglect your families. But don't neglect your spiritual family, and your local church. Seriously consider: How would you pour your energy into the members of Calvary, if you could put your everything into loving them? How would you build up the church? What would it look like to truly devote yourself, in love, to them?

Paul certainly thinks we should be considering this enough that the next imperative says, “**Outdo one another in showing honor.**” Considering how to love others tends to help grow our love. Our head and heart work together. When we decide to love, we look for ways to take joy in what we delight in. Find delight in one another. Like someone who is lovestruck and has a growing heart for what they see, be lovestruck for your church. Let your head and your hearts overflow to the point where you *want* to do things for them, and *do* things for them.

Outdoing one another can take various forms. Visit one another. Share meals with each other. Ask how each other are, and really listen. Ask them how you can pray for them, *and actually praying for them* (then and there, as you're able). Actually take time to hear what they say, and what's going on beneath the surface. One commentator argued that outdoing each other also means actively deferring to others, showing them honour when they have the ability to speak into others' lives. We should be quick (eager, even) to honour one another. Not just thinking about honouring each other, but truly honouring others.

Our church is kind in showing honour to us pastors when you refer to us by “pastor”. But honour for the church can, and does, also mean honouring each other by calling fellow members “brother” or “sister”. They are terms Christians have always used to show honour and affection to each other. You're affirming that they're part of your eternal heavenly family, and your current church family!

The text really brings that home for us: “Do not be slothful in zeal,” or “In haste!” “Don’t hesitate.” It’s not an infomercial where they say “don’t wait, call now,” BUT the urgency that builds up in you when you hear those tactics is the urgency you should feel. Don’t plan to serve the saints *later*. Seek them out. Serve them now. And not just them. “Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.”

Does this suddenly change? Are we now talking about God, and not our fellow believers? I don’t think that’s what the text is saying here. We, by serving the saints, and being zealous to love each other with familial affections is a way to serve the Lord. One commentator said “be aglow,” with the Holy Spirit, putting your whole heart and soul into loving service of one another. We see here that it’s similar to what Paul teaches in Colossians 3, when he tells servants:

Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.

We are called to have a heart that would serve our brothers and sisters like slaves are called to serve their masters, willfully putting ourselves out for one another. And how? With a fervent spirit.

What is a fervent spirit? I need to, probably, be cautious here. I, on the one hand, want to encourage you to hear it with the emphasis of the text, having our spirit “boil”, as it were, in our zeal to outdo each other. The text gives the sense of having full enthusiasm. But this is *not* at the cost of our self-control. We want to be people who are marked by holy passion. We’re to be Christians who have a deep heart and joyful service for one another to the fullness of our reason. The beginning of this chapter even encourages this. Verse 1, “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable

to God, which is your spiritual worship.” The words, “spiritual worship” can also be rendered “reasonable service”. The church is an institution God has put in society to glorify his name, and he is a *reasonable, rational*, God. Zeal to do good means having a spirit that yearns to glorify God and care for his people. Not the erratic claims of letting the Holy Spirit whip you up into a frenzy where you have no self control. Or where you get inklings That’s an abuse of God’s Word and a lie of the Devil. We must take the Holy Spirit seriously, and we must be filled with the fruit of the Holy Spirit. He is active and spurs us on to love one another. He fills us with zeal for God, and reminds us, over and over, of our need for Jesus. Be fervent in spirit as we follow the prompting of the Holy Spirit to love and serve others.

Doing that leads to our next set of imperatives. Verse 12. It says, “Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.” These three are grouped together stylistically. In hope, we rejoice. In tribulation, we endure. In prayer, we’re constant. That is the expected stance of a believer. Christians are always able to rejoice because we have an eternal hope: We have been reconciled to the Father by the Son. The gospel gives us hope, which leads to our joyful celebration of freedom. We’re free, and we know it.

Christians are the only group of people who should always have a reason to party. Not just for birthdays, or milestones, or big accomplishments, or holidays. We have reason to celebrate everyday! There was a sermon I listened to 11 years ago, and the preacher talked about Christians being the ones quickest to laugh. He said “they’ll know we are Christians by our love and our laughter.” Then he said “we’re the only people on the face of the earth who know how to party. And we’re the only people on the face of the earth who have anything about which to party!” He goes on to talk about the movement of the soul that wells up in Christians as we celebrate the joy of our salvation and hope we always have.

Knowing that, how could we not, in the face of tribulations, have patience? Of course we can endure. Not because the trials are light. Far from it! We know that there will be trouble. Jesus says “**in this world you will have trouble.**” Troubles rise. The world hates us, because they hated God first. Life is tough. Really tough. Where we have loved ones die. As we’re thinking of a member in our very congregation that just recently died. As we think of those in our church who are watching their parents grow weak before their eyes. Where marriages are in rocky waters. And where children are sick or we just wanna quit. We have trials all around us.

BUT! Jesus also tells us, “**take heart! I have overcome the world.**” That hope grounds us. That gives us not only a reason to rejoice, but the ability to endure patiently in tribulation. When you are going through these things, Calvary, pause. Take a step back. These tragedies are heartbreaking. Death is real. Pain exists. Sadness and loneliness creep in and try to steal our joy. But God is our strength and he’s available to you. So pray. Pray without ceasing. Be constant in your prayers. We are people who are more likely to pray when times are tough. God made us like that. He reminds us to seek him in our lowest lows. Whether you’re at your highest high, and life is going amazing for you, or if you’re in the depths of despair, he’s still there. He’s constantly with you.

Constant in prayer doesn’t mean having your eyes closed, or your hands folded 24/7. But it does mean having communion with God. Prayer is a reminder that we can’t be our own saviour. As I recently quoted, these trials are a reminder to keep us from our self-centred idolatry where we start to put ourselves on the throne, rather than the Lord of Life. Let the self-centred desires die. You could say “**be persistent in prayers.**” When you start to orient your life, more and more, around the life of the church, the more you see God’s fingerprints everywhere. Prayer can take many forms. Meditating on God’s Word. Singing truths about God. Journaling.

Short prayers, long prayers, whatever it may be. Your prayer life isn't graded. But you have the privilege of prayer and it's a tool God gives us to endure. We get to talk to God who *loves us and communicates with us*. What an encouragement! I hope that you find this encouraging, and that it spurs you on to pray. And don't get embarrassed that you haven't prayed. If you do... Pray right there! Pray right now. Talk with God until it becomes a natural default. It's something we are *all* still working on. Pastor Matt just talked about prayer a few weeks ago, if you want to spend more time dwelling on prayer.

And finally, verse 13. Look at it with me. “**Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.**” This, if you haven't already gathered, is what genuine love was pointing towards. The rest of the commands flow into this. It's the natural conclusion to what was just stated. I hope that you've been able to answer the question I asked earlier. What would it look like to devote yourself to your brothers and sisters here at Calvary? How could you contribute to the needs of the saints? How can you seek to show hospitality?

Galatians 6:9-10 says:

And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

We, of course, want to love others beyond the church. But Romans 12 is teaching what Galatians is also saying: Let us do good. Yes, to everyone! But especially to the household of faith. Verses 14-21 focus on how we, as believers, can seek to love others beyond the church. But verses 9-13 is how we can love within.

Romans 12 is kinda like the “do” version of 1 Corinthians 13. The “love” chapter, as it's known. Love is patient, kind, not envious, boastful, nor insistent on its own way. Love bears, believes, and endures all things. 1 Corinthians 13 is the indicative version of Romans 12's imperatives. Since we know we must love, these are commands that grow us into love. And

since we have been taught what love is, from God first, we get the joyful privilege of growing, being sanctified, in godly affection for one another.

I hope the promise of the gospel, and the reality of hope, love, and joy from the good God of Life brings you the drive to love one another, as God has first loved you. May we stir one another up in showing honour as we learn to love God's church. This church. My dear brothers and sisters. You, here today, Calvary. Let's pray.

Almighty God, our loving heavenly Father, we are so thankful for you. What great hope we have through your Son. Thank you for sending your Son. Thank you for his perfect life you credited to us, who believe. I pray for those here who are still deciding what it means to follow you. And I pray for those here this morning who have believed the gospel. God, we are blessed that you love us. Blessed that you sent the Holy Spirit to grow us. Continue to grow us. Make us ever more grateful for you. And make your glory shine through us, as we become a beacon of hope, light, and life. Not only to those around us that need to hear, but also to our brothers and sisters as we lift up the church. We pray this, in the matchless name of Jesus. Amen.