

When in Rome: A Higher Love

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Preacher: Kent Dixon

[0:00] Well, good morning, everyone. Welcome here this morning. It's good to see you. Everybody's two-thirds to the back. I've been away and I'm noticing it freshly again. Grumble, grumble, grumble. I'm going to move the pulpit down there. You get closer.

I'll just start removing pews from the back. So I have a question for you this morning. Do you know the Muffin Man? No. Do you know Steve Bell? Lots of head shakes and a few yups.

So if you don't know who Steve Bell is, Steve is an amazingly talented, award-winning Christian singer-songwriter who travels across Canada. He puts on live concerts that are usually hosted in churches.

So a brief bio. Over the course of his 30-year solo career, Steve has been sharing a message of love, hope, and faith through stories, songs, and writings.

He's a purveyor of truth and beauty. And he's a champion of kindness on a focused mission for, as his website says, refreshing Christian faith and spiritual tradition for the weary and the wary.

[1:29] I love how that's worded. Steve is a mentor to many and an advocate for numerous meaningful causes. Ladies and gentlemen, Steve Bell. No. Just kidding. Steve and his team have mainly been focused on larger venues for their concerts.

So if you've ever seen Steve live, it's usually big churches where he has performed at in the past. We saw him at a big Catholic church in St. Albert a few years ago. Before that, somewhere in Sherwood Park.

And before that, another place that also escapes my mind. But it was big. So these are big venues normally. So more recently, though, they've been focusing on performing in smaller churches and other venues.

So this spring, they usually often will send out a call to host. So if you're interested in hosting, you know, reach out to us, respond. So Pat did that on our behalf.

So we were connected with his team a few months ago, and they said they have host openings available. So we said we're humbled and delighted to be considered.

[2:40] And then crickets for quite a while. So Pat and I talked about it a few times, and we said, well, nice to have had the opportunity anyway. And they usually do bigger venues.

But then we were really surprised to hear a response back to let us know that Bramard had actually been chosen as a host church for the fall tour. So on Saturday, October 3rd at 7.30 p.m., as you can see on the slide here, we will be hosting Steve Bell and his team right here for an evening of beautiful music and powerful lyrics.

So again, raise your hand if you've seen Steve live in concert. Okay, now hold the hands up. Everybody in the congregation who has never seen Steve, see these people, ask them what they think.

Steve is awesome. So if you haven't heard him yet, haven't had the experience of hearing his music and his lyrics and things like that, he is really amazing.

And I'm not getting paid for any of that endorsement. He is amazing. So I encourage you to be here on Saturday, October 3rd at 7.30 p.m., partly because this is our church, right?

[3:56] So there's an opportunity for us to welcome people. And then also, I mean, as Christians, we don't know how we feel about pride all the time, but I think we can take pride, a little bit of pride, in the fact that, hey, cool, we get to do this.

I never thought I'd see Steve Bell here in my own church. So here we are. Michelle and I have seen Steve in concert several times over the years, and as obviously have others in our congregation.

And I promise you that you will have an evening that will lift your spirits and fill your heart. So each Sunday between now and the concert, I'll be letting us know more about it.

We'll also have flyers. Flyers are available on a table in the foyer right now. And more about the table in a second. So you can take those flyers and share them with friends and family, invite people that you know.

We're doing lots of promotion. Steve's team is doing lots of promotion. So we want to pack this place. Like there's a capacity for just over 300. Let's pack it.

[5:03] That'd be cool, right? So as I say, I'll be letting you know more about it. Tickets are available through the church. So you can call the church office, talk to me, talk to Pat or Carol or kind of the front people.

And speaking of the table and tickets, you can buy tickets starting this morning. They are \$29 if you buy them in advance. And you can buy them here or through Steve's website.

And Steve's website is listed on the slide. So stay tuned for more info each week as we get closer to the concert date. We also need, not a big surprise to you probably, volunteers.

So it's not a huge amount of work, but there's lots of different roles that need to be covered. And so connect with Pat or Carol to know more about volunteers. Sound good?

Any questions? Any answers? No? All right. Will you pray with me this morning? Father God, we come to you today with open hearts.

[6:04] Your word calls us to a higher standard of love. We confess this morning that our love is often or can be weak and even selfish.

Forgive us for the times that we've worn a mask of kindness while harboring bitterness inside. Lord, I ask that you would cleanse our hearts today.

Holy Spirit, give us the courage to hate what is evil and hold fast. Be committed to what is good.

Make our consciences sharp, Lord. Attune us to what we see, hear, and do. Don't let us be comfortable with sin. Instead, fill us with a hunger for righteousness as only you can.

Help us to filter out the toxic influences of this world and cling tightly to your truth. Father, we pray for our church family.

[7:05] Teach us to love one another with deep, brotherly, and sisterly affection. Break down the walls that divide us. Father, when storms hit our community, help us to pull together rather than drift apart.

Give us eyes to see the lonely, the hurting, and the overlooked in our midst and outside our doors. May this church be a true home for all who enter.

Lord, cure us of our pride. Forgive our constant desire to be first, to be right, or to be noticed. Teach us the beautiful art of honoring and uplifting others above ourselves.

Give us the grace to celebrate our neighbor's success. Help us to gladly take the lower seat so that others may be lifted up.

Father, we thank you for your Son, Jesus Christ, who showed us the ultimate definition of genuine love. And it's in his holy and loving name that we pray.

[8:18] Amen. Welcome here for this Sunday, August 23rd, 2026. In case you have forgotten, and that would be totally fair, my name is Kent Dixon, and it's my joy to be the pastor here.

I should have had like a photo or something, a guest book. I was here to see. So maybe you're wondering, as a few people have asked us already this morning, what we got up to while we've been away.

Well, our vacation started off great. We were thoroughly cleaning our basement carpets. Then a few days later, we noticed some damp carpet in our basement against one wall as we were moving things around and drying out the freshly cleaned carpets.

And then the drywall, as I was poking around, just above it was also damp. And I thought, oh, no. So the next morning, I called our insurance company.

We let them know. We opened a claim. So that was Thursday. Two days later, remember the torrential storm we had on a Saturday? Yeah.

[9:25] So we got hit with that massive rainstorm that overwhelmed the storm drains in our neighborhood. As Michelle was actually doing the Lord's work in the basement, I went outside and went, what a storm.

What's going on? Hiked up my pants because I didn't want to get wet. But I looked out our door.

And first of all, monsoon. Second of all, from the middle of the little horseshoe crescent that we live in, across the, over the sidewalk, up onto the lawns of the houses just nearby us.

And I thought, oh, that's probably not good. So then I heard a, not a scream, but it was like a, it was a horrified sound from the basement.

So I beat my way down there. Water was gushing up into our basement from the overwhelming, overwhelmed storm drains outside up through our pipes in our basement.

Fortunately, I'm trying to look on the bright side of everything in life. Fortunately, it wasn't poop water. It was just dirty storm water with some sediment in it, but still not amazing.

[10:39] So that generated insurance claim number two, because our insurance company said they couldn't roll it all together. And I said, it's the same basement, the same carpet, the same drywall.

And they said, doesn't matter. So we opened a new claim that had damaged the rest of our basement. So I was saying to somebody this morning, quite literally, we had this much between the one side and the other side that was still okay.

So I jokingly suggested we could live in that area and be relatively confident of safety. But we then wound up spending the majority of our vacation, three weeks at least, tearing out carpet and drywall and dealing with the insurance company and cleaning our floors with bleach water.

Yippee. Yippee. So I know many of you have been dealing with flooding in your homes. We've dealt with lots of flooding here at the church. And this summer has not been awesome for everyone.

But we will all get through it. I promise. Just don't drive under the white mud. Under overpasses. I'm back. This morning, we're continuing in our sermon series, When in Rome.

[11:54] We're making our way through the book of Romans, as you know, and we're uncovering some of these really important things, these timeless truths that it holds that are relevant for us today. And we've been looking at how to apply some of the things that Paul teaches in Romans.

So just a short recap of where we left off before we went on vacation. In our last sermon in this series, on July 19th, we looked at Romans 12, 3-8.

And we considered what it means to be a part of the body of Christ. Do you remember that? We were reminded of all the various kinds of gifts and skills that God gives people.

And that while we may not have the same gifts and skills as someone else, we still have unique, important, and special gifts of our own that God has given us.

Ultimately, God gives us skills and gifts with intention. And his design is that all of us are needed as essential parts of the greater body.

[12:54] It's through all of God's people serving together that God's family functions as it is always intended to function. So when we try and go it alone, how does that work?

Anyone? Anyone tried to go it alone? Anyone? Anyone found they face planted? Yeah, not amazing. I'm so glad I'm a part of the family of God.

An oldie bit of giddy. So our passage for this morning is Romans 12, 9 and 10. So go ahead and turn there. It's a shortie, but so am I.

Romans 12, 9 and 10, which says, love must be sincere. Paul says, hate what is evil, cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love.

Honor one another above yourselves. Romans 12, 9 and 10. So our sermon this morning is titled, A Higher Love.

[13:58] And this phrase popped into my head because of the topic, but then also because I love 80s music and there was a band called Level 42. Yeah. So look it up.

So we're going to take a closer look at the kind of love that we're called to as followers of Jesus.

And as we've already heard this morning, Paul tells us in this passage, short passage, Romans 12, 9 and 10, to let our love be genuine.

Real love isn't a show that's just for appearances. And it needs to involve a deep change of heart to become part of who we are.

So this morning, we're going to look at three ways we can live out the kind of love that God wants us to feel. God wants us to experience. And then also to share with other people.

Our first point this morning, as Paul says, is to hate evil and hold firmly to good. Paul tells us that we should have a sincere or think honest love, one that is genuine.

[15:07] So what does he mean by that? What is he trying to get at there? I think it may be helpful if we consider what the opposite kind of love looks like. Set a baseline.

Well, a fake kind of love is something we may have personally experienced ourselves. Maybe you can relate to someone showing love or professing their love for you, and yet their behavior was

different.

Or maybe you can picture that, right? Even if you haven't experienced it yourself. Maybe love where someone claims to love you, but then as I just kind of touched on, their actions or the way they speak to you or treat you in general indicates something very different.

Maybe you grew up in a family where love was transactional. I know a lot of people, that's their experience. Where a certain kind of behavior or actions were required to receive any kind of love or affection at all.

From your spouse, from your siblings, from your children even. And sadly, sometimes our words really don't line up with the way we feel either.

[16:23] We may talk about love. We sing about it. We sang about it a bit this morning. But do we always live up to it?

Maybe hearing that passage this morning might make you feel guilty. And, you know, that's my job as your pastor. Make you feel guilty as possible. So you feel ashamed through your week.

Not at all. But it's important for us to recognize, do our words and our actions, the way we behave and the way we say we are, do they always line up?

How do we live with sincerity and not hypocrisy? That's probably the easiest way to put it. So remember that as we've been working our way through Romans, Paul's just been talking about being transformed by what?

Oh, come on. I wasn't gone that long. By the renewal of our minds. Be transformed by the renewal of your minds. So we should be getting the idea that this kind of love that Paul's talking about really is not possible at all under our own power, right?

[17:35] It's not possible without a sincere transformation that needs to happen. Remember that love is a central aspect, even maybe the most essential aspect of God's character.

God is love. So the more we focus our minds on God's love and mercies towards each of us, and in fact towards all humanity, it's not an exclusive club, we'll appreciate being loved and loving others in the way that God wants.

Unconditional love. True, godly love serves as a strong foundation that's constant and dependable. And in forming a godly love, that also means that we should hate things that are evil, and that's the point there, right?

So think about a water filter. I hate to even use the word water. It feels like a bad word lately. Boy, it's been so dry this summer, hasn't it? So think of a water filter.

It lets clean water pass right through it, doesn't it? It blocks the toxic things that could hurt us. I want you to think that love does the same thing with sin.

[19:01] What kinds of choices do you make throughout your day? Do you take things that hurt or offend God far too lightly? Do you work in an environment where profanity is common, and you just kind of blend in when you go to work?

I can't remember if I've told you this story or not. It's a short one, so you can roll your eyes at me if I have told you it before. There's a RCMP chaplain that I work with who's now in a fairly senior RCMP chaplaincy role.

And she said to me once that she was working in a detachment, and she was talking to a bunch of RCMP members, and the Fs and whatever are flying fast and furious.

So somebody suddenly reacted and said, oh, chaplain, I'm so sorry. And her response is so awesome. It stuck with me. She said, I understand the language.

I just don't speak it. I don't speak it. Cool, hey? Because it's not disrespectful. It's not talking down to somebody and making them feel dumb. It's not acting holier than thou.

[20:17] It says, yeah, I get it, and you're not freaking me out. But I don't speak that. That happened to me once when an RCMP member came up to me when I was in a building.

And he said, oh, you're new. I haven't seen you before. And I said, I'm your volunteer chaplain. And he said, oh, that's awesome. And we were talking a little bit. And then he said, you know, I'm glad we have a chaplain now because these MFs need Jesus.

And I laughed so hard. And he looked at me and kind of a little smile, right? So I talked to another chaplain.

And I said, is that a test? And he said, oh, that was absolutely a test. Because he said, what are the options that you could have taken? You could have shuddered and said, oh, no, my virgin ears.

And he said, you would have shut down that relationship. But instead, you laughed. You didn't respond in the same way. And so you opened a bit of a door.

[21:20] So what are the things that we do or say or expose ourselves to in our lives that offend God? That might be contrary to what he wants for us?

Do we take those things too lightly? Maybe. Friends, turn away from bad habits. Easier said than done.

And I'm speaking of myself as well. We must seek to change and choose the things that are pure and holy. Things that will shape you in the right ways.

I've talked to you before about the garbage that we tend to expose ourselves to, right? But, I mean, don't go see the Odyssey because it's not historically accurate.

That's a joke. It is awesome if you want to sit for three hours. So choose the things that are of God in your life.

[22:19] And I'm not saying read your Bible 24-7. Don't read fiction. Don't watch Netflix. I'm not saying any of those things. But the Spirit will speak to you and kind of give you a little bit of a nudge when you're doing something that's maybe not awesome.

So listen for that nudge. Our second point this morning is to love each other deeply as family. And that's what Paul kind of alludes to next.

So in moving to verse 2, Paul encourages us to be devoted to one another in love is how he says it. And sometimes the wording here that I've seen in other sources is kindly affectionate.

It's kind of a neat way to view it, right? It comes from the Greek word philistorgos. And that can be translated to love as family.

So Paul's encouraging us to love others in the same way that we would love our own family members. And stop for a second and we think, I hate my entire family.

[23:21] How could I possibly? Okay, just put that aside then. Because even when I talk about on Father's Day or Mother's Day, right, sometimes positive experiences in relational family issues and sometimes not great examples.

So if you have a loving, tight bond with family members, use that version. You should have great love and affection for those who are in Christ as you are.

How are you doing with loving other believers as you do your closest family members? I'll tell you, I've had lots of conversations with lots of pastor friends in all kinds of different settings.

And they're kind of surprised by how hurt they have been. How they have been hurt. There you go. Holiday brain. Flooding basement holiday brain.

But how hurt they have been by people who call themselves followers of Christ in their own church family. Okay. I have friends who have walked away from ministry because they were hurt by people in their church family who call themselves Christians.

[24:38] So how are you doing that with that? Loving other believers as you do your closest family members? Are you critical of your brothers and sisters? Are you judgmental of them?

Does your correction come with an edge? Not love? Friends, if we can't manage to even love our brothers and sisters in Christ unconditionally and humbly, how successful do you think we're going to be at showing love to people who don't even know God yet?

What does our witness look like if we can't get it right with our own brothers and sisters in Christ? As we've recognized so far this morning, Paul uses family words here, right? We are brothers and sisters in Christ.

It is the family of God. This isn't funky theological language. It's not something that needs to be untangled or understood in some way. It means what it says.

[25:48] So our love for each other should be both warm and loyal, right? You should never have an experience where something gets back to you that somebody who you thought was a Christian said about you.

Not even from a gossip perspective, but if something ever gets back to you that somebody said something hurtful, what does that do? What does that do for your relationship with that person?

What does that do for your connection to the church?

What does that do for your relationship with God? If you begin to think these people, your people, are monstrous. It's important stuff to think about.

Maybe you haven't noticed, but we've had a lot of storms in this region this spring and summer. It's almost winter, so we've got that. At least the water stops moving.

So when family members are gathered to shelter during a storm, everyone tends to stick together, right? We talk about where is everybody, where are the exits. We look out for one another's safety. [26:53] Family doesn't run away from each other in times of crisis. They pull together inside the house. God's family should do this both in good times and in hard times, in difficult times.

So what does that mean in practical terms? Well, you could call a lonely church member this week, somebody that you don't see here this morning, and you just wonder how they're doing.

Not a checkup. Not a, huh, you were in a church this morning, right? Wrong tone. Wrong approach. So treat other believers like your own blood relatives.

Share a meal with someone that you know is struggling. Spend time. That's a good way to put that kind of love, intentional love, into practice.

So our third point this morning is to outdo each other, one another, in showing honor. So you've heard me say this before.

[27:59] Human nature and the message of the world tells us to have more stuff. To be first. If you're not first, you're a loser. To stand out from the crowd.

If you blend in, you must be a nobody. What an underachiever. To be recognized for our own achievements. Hey, if you didn't notice, I did this and this and this and this.

What do you think of me now? So whether those things come from an insecurity or for a desire for attention, they suggest to other people that you're not really connected with God in the way you might want to be.

Because if you don't put others and their attention first, if you don't see God's love over attention from other people, I think you're missing it a little bit.

And that's not me judging you because I do it too. We all have that little monster in the back of our heads that says, Well, I did all of this and nobody even noticed.

[29:01] And I say it at home sometimes. Hey, did you notice I mowed that lawn? Who cares? We are a team. We do what needs to be done.

And no one needs a medal. So hopefully it doesn't surprise us to recognize that Paul essentially says we should race to see who can respect others the most.

Sounds like a fun competition. To put other people first. And I mean, we know this as Christians.

We're supposed to put other people first. We're supposed to love other people and God first.

That's the core of what we believe. So picture a polite door holding contest. With both people saying, No, you go first.

Over and over. Maybe you've experienced that in an elevator, in an elevator lobby. I have several times and then I joke with it about the people. You say, No, you go first.

[30:04] So we're Christian and Canadian. Ooh, that's double whammy. So you're standing, No, you go first. No, you go first. Or you're on the car and the elevator opens and you say, Okay, no, you go ahead.

No, you go ahead. Has it happened to you? It's happened to me a lot. So it's maybe a bit of a silly image, but hopefully you get the idea of what I'm after there.

Let someone else take the credit. At work, at home, or at church. It's not loving or kind to speak to or treat someone kindly and with love to their face, then speak unkindly about them behind their back.

So many of you are maybe hearing some of these hard words I'm giving you this morning and thinking, Maybe he could go on vacation again. But some of this stuff has really struck me while I was away and had time to think.

So this is where the wisdom of Thumper's mom comes in to my mind. The animated movie, Bambi. Maybe it's before your time.

[31:16] Maybe it's after your time. Maybe you have no time for it at all. But Bambi's mom said, What? If you can't say something nice, That's right.

If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all. Some other suggestions are to speak kindly to a difficult neighbor. Lift a friend up when you know they need it.

Give someone else the credit rather than seeking the spotlight for yourself. It's actually quite liberating when you stop and think, I don't need attention for this.

God knows I did it. I can be humble and loving towards someone else. And turns out, you'll probably feel good. So as we've reflected this morning on the idea of godly love that Paul calls us to, He calls us to hate evil and hold firmly to good.

Seek the things of God and listen when the Spirit tells you, This is a bad choice. Love each other deeply as family. Think of the closest familial relationship you know.

[32 : 32] Either it's a current one, might even be a past one. And try and treat other believers and even people in general as family. Start with the benefit of the doubt.

And then seek to outdo one another in showing honor. We should put a little chart in the foyer. Just give people stars. Oh, good job. But that'd be seeking attention, wouldn't it?

See, I just did it. But seek to outdo one another in showing honor to other people, in lifting other people up for what they do, how they serve, how they're gifted.

Redirect the attention from yourself. My sisters and brothers, we are called to a higher love. It's just that simple.

A genuine love that starts with Jesus. His example in his life and his ministry, in his sacrificial death, and his glorious resurrection.

[33 : 36] Jesus laid down his life for us first. He loved us before we were ever born. He paid the penalty that was ours to bear.

Freeing us then to fully experience God's love and the blessings that are freely given to us by him. To each of us. Let's seek to walk in this true kind of love.

Starting right now. Amen. Amen.