

True Love

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[0:00] Well, good morning. My name's Gareth. I'm going to do the Bible reading this morning. So, if you'd like to turn in your Bibles, look up in your app, Romans chapter 12.

And we're going to read from verses 9 to the end of the chapter, verse 21. Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil. Hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.

Do not be slothful in zeal. Be fervent in spirit. Serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope. Be patient in tribulation. Be constant in prayer.

Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice. Weep with those who weep.

Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil.

[1:17] But give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God. For it is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.

To the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink. For by so doing, you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Good morning, everyone. Let's ask for God's help as we come to consider his word. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you that we can gather here this morning. Thank you that we are free to meet, to sing your praises, to encourage one another.

[2:27] As we turn our minds to your word now, we ask that you would help us to focus on it. Please enable me to speak clearly and truly. And we pray that you would encourage and challenge each one of us.

We thank you for your love and we pray that it would resonate in our hearts and in our lives. In Jesus' name, amen. If you were to sum up Christian ethics in one word, you know, just a single word that captures all of how God wants us to be and what God wants of us, one word that best sums up the example Jesus gives us, one word for Christian ethics, I'd hazard a guess that the majority of us would come up with the same word and that word is, of course, love.

The Christian gospel is the story of God's love for us. A sacrificial love. Romans 5 verse 8, God shows his love for us in this, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

An unbreakable love. Romans 8 verse 39, nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. The gospel is the old, old story of Jesus and his love.

If the gospel is the old, old story of God's love for us, Christian ethics is the ongoing story of God's love in us.

[4:10] See the difference? The gospel, the story of God's love for us. Christian ethics, as Sarah so wonderfully illustrated in the kids' talk, the story of God's love in us.

Romans 5 verse 5, God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit he's given us. Christian ethics is about God transforming us so that we learn to love as he loved us.

And so when we come to the book of Romans, Romans chapters 1 to 11 are about the love God has for us, and Romans chapters 12 to 15 are about the love that God works in us.

But in the words of the 1984 Howard Jones rock ballad, what is love anyway? Or maybe that should be, what is la-a-a-a-a-a of anyway?

Okay, two people laughed. What is love? Now that's too big a question to be answered by a single passage of Scripture.

[5:24] And so we've got lots of texts in the Bible that help us see what love is in different ways. If someone were to ask you, you know, what is love?

Show me in the Bible what love is. You might take them to 1 Corinthians chapter 13. That beautiful poem about love. Love is patient. Love is kind. It does not envy.

It does not boast. You might take them to 1 John chapter 4. God is love. And in this is love. Not that we loved God, but that he loved us and gave his son, sent his son as a propitiation for our sins.

You might even take them to Ephesians chapter 5. Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. Now those are the kinds of passages we think of when it comes to love.

What is love? And they're the kind of passages I get asked to preach on when I'm asked to preach at weddings. I've spoken on each of those passages multiple times at weddings. No engaged couple, though, has ever asked me to preach on Romans 12 verses 9 to 21.

[6:35] Yet it has as its heading, let love be genuine. Do you see that at the start of verse 9? Let love be genuine.

Actually, the word let isn't there in Greek. If we were to translate it literally, it's just genuine love.

Kind of like a heading. I mean, I think let is implied, but as written, literally, genuine love.

Or maybe even more literally, unhypocritical love. In other words, true love. And that heading of genuine, unhypocritical, true love, that hangs over all of the rest that follows.

Like as a banner. So let's think about this in some context. In context, Paul has already introduced the latter chapters of Romans.

In chapter 12 verse 1, in this way, I appeal to you, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

[7:46] Paul has introduced this part of his letter as a response to the mercy of God, given all that Paul had shown about God's love and his mercy in his first 11 chapters.

How do we respond? And in verse 1 of chapter 12, he says, well, we respond by giving, by offering God everything. Our bodies as living sacrifices, everything we are belongs to God.

It's all his. That's our spiritual worship. We hold nothing back. Okay, but what does that look like?

Well, that's what Paul unpacks in the rest of chapters 12 to 15. And what it looks like, Paul says in chapter 12 verse 9, is love, genuine love.

And that's another thread that ties together these chapters. It's there in that heading of sorts I just mentioned in verse 9. Paul returns to it in chapter 13 verses 8 to 10, where he, as Jesus did, he says, all the commandments of God are summed up in the command to love our neighbour.

[8:55] And it underlies an exhortation or a theme Paul's going to develop in chapters 14 and 15. In chapters 14 and 15, Paul draws the Roman believers' attention to a specific issue among them, a failure of love that he wants to address.

But the passage before us this morning, chapter 12 verses 9 to 21, it's kind of less focused than, say, chapters 14 and 15, or even chapters...

It's less focused than those later parts. What we've got here is this rapid-fire sequence of exhortations where Paul, it seems, jumps abruptly from one idea to another.

The flow of thought's often unclear. One commentator called it, I was reading, spoke of it, an apparently haphazard arrangement. Now, how do all these ideas connect together?

Well, on the one hand, I don't want to sort of over-systematise what I'm saying here. We do have a collection of ideas here and we need to sort of let each one stand with its own integrity.

[10:09] Nevertheless, Paul does hang over it this heading, let love be genuine. So, in some sense, Paul is still articulating what it means to be a person of true love, who loves unhypocritically.

So, let's think about each part. I'm going to see how I go for time. We might not get through the whole passage, but we'll get through as much as we can with the time available. So, first, let's think about the heading itself, let love be genuine.

Why did Paul even need to say this? Like, why does Paul need to say to them, let love be genuine? He needs to say it because once you have a society where love is prized as the chief virtue and where love is sort of elevated as the heart of ethics, it's inevitable that counterfeits to love will emerge.

If love isn't highly valued, and love wasn't the centre of ethics in the wider Graco-Roman world, but if love isn't highly valued, then no one will bother feigning it.

You don't have to pretend to love if people don't really care about love. But once love is the centre, as it was as soon as the church sprang into existence, that love was at the heart of Christian ethics from the very beginning, once love is the centre, once it's the highest virtue, then there's a risk of pretense.

[11:45] And that was so for the church from its early beginnings. It's the same, I would say, is actually true today for our wider society as well, because such has been the profound impact of Christianity on Western culture that love is still seen as the centre of ethics, not just in the church now, but in all of our society, of ethics, of any form, I should say.

So just about, what that means is just about everyone today, both in the church and in Australia and in Western countries in general, just about everyone today will claim that whatever they're doing, they're doing because of love.

I mean, think about that, right? You hear people say, now, yes, I know sometimes people say things like, you know, speak of hate and so on, but generally people will justify whatever they're doing, whatever it happens to be, as being loving.

And that can be, you know, whatever the issue, whatever stance they take on the issue, whatever side of politics they're on, whatever their behaviour, whatever their methods, they'll claim to have love on their side.

Love is so highly prized in our society that self-deception has become a significant risk. We can think we're loving when we're not actually loving.

[13:22] We've become skilled at convincing ourselves that that is so. So what was a potential problem in the first century, what was a potential problem in the early church, just the problem of counterfeit love, is now a problem everywhere in our whole society.

But Paul exhorts believers, don't be those who fake love or who kid yourselves that you are loving when you're not really loving. Let love be genuine.

And the first thing you need for love to be genuine is what Paul says next. In the second part of verse 9, he says, Abhor what is evil, hold fast to what is good.

Genuine love, Paul says, is grounded. It possesses, it's grounded in reality. It possesses moral discernment and moral conviction.

You can't love other people if you don't know what is good because love is seeking what's good for others. If you don't know what's good, how can you seek it?

[14:36] I have a friend whose mother, when he was, I don't know, 12 or 13 years old or something, his mother introduced him to marijuana and encouraged him to use it.

And that started for him an addiction that enslaved him for years until finally Jesus freed him from it. Now perhaps that mother thought she was loving her son, but in reality she was doing him great harm.

In order to love people, you need to know what is good for people. And here we find ourselves in a really strange place in the 21st century.

Because on the one hand, Western culture is indebted to Christianity for elevating love as the chief virtue. But on the other hand, Western civilisation is in conflict with Christianity because it has untethered love from its grounding.

See, in Christian thought, what is good good is objective? It's grounded in reality. In philosophical terms, good has an ontological basis in reality.

[16:00] Now, if you think about it, there are two parts, there are two main parts to reality. There's God and there's creation. Everything that exists is either God or creation.

There are two parts of reality. reality. And reality determines what's good. So, good is defined, on the one hand, by God himself, by his character, and on the other hand, by the kind of creation he's made, the moral order of the universe, the nature and the purpose of things as God has created them.

And if good is grounded in reality, then evil, by corollary, is just defined as anything that's contrary to reality, that contradicts, it's against the character of God or it's against the good moral order of creation.

But, you see, while our society is held on to love as the key concept when it comes to ethics, it's untethered love from reality.

It's untethered love from the existence and character of God. It's untethered love from the nature of creation as creation. And so, from any true basis for good and evil.

[17:21] And so, now many in our society are saying good and evil are subjective. You know, they're subjective to the individual. There's no basis for really working out what's good except for individual feelings and preferences.

So, even in 1984, in that song I referenced earlier, Howard Jones sang, maybe love is letting people be just what they want to be. Now, if that's what someone was singing in 1984, then here in 2026, you know, we're 40 years later down that path.

Maybe love is just letting people be just what they want to be. There's, there's no longer a reference point for what is good in external reality.

The only reference point is our own desires and preferences. whatever we want. Now, we know the end point of that, don't we?

You know, we know where that's brought us as a society. It's brought us to the point where, you know, if someone says, I wish I was born in a different body, we'll give them drugs with permanent harmful consequences and mutilate their bodies and do it all in the name of love.

[18:45] Moral confusion reigns. But if you want to be someone who truly loves, someone of genuine love, you need moral discernment.

You need to learn what's good and learn what's evil. And that means you need to get to know God and his character. and you need to learn from him what his creation is, how it's ordered, what he designed it for, who you are, what it means to be a human being, what you're made for.

And to learn these things, you need to meditate on his word. You need moral discernment. But actually, moral discernment on its own is not enough. You also need moral conviction.

Verse 9 doesn't say, know what is evil and know what is good. It says, abhor what is evil and hold fast to what is good.

They're strong words. We need a passionate attachment to what is good and we need an abhorrence and horror concerning evil. In a famous poem written in the aftermath of the First World War, William Butler Yeats described the moral confusion of his day with these words, the best lack all conviction, the worst are filled with passionate intensity.

[20:09] It's no use if we know what's evil but don't abhor it. It's no use if we know what's good but don't cling to it.

We can't love if we're casual about good and evil. without moral conviction we won't be stirred to act. We need conviction to rouse us from our slumber so that we'll step in love towards others. May God teach us to abhor what is evil and to hold fast to what is good. Okay, I've spent a lot of time on verse 9.

The remainder of the passage I think we can divide up into three sections. Verses 10 to 13 loves dimensions, verses 14 to 16 loves adaptations and verses 17 to 21 loves victory.

So loves dimensions verses 10 to 13. Verses 10 to 13 are grouped together by a distinctive and repeated kind of arrangement of words.

[21:21] It's kind of hard to see in English translation but these verses they all lack finite verbs, that is the normal kind of verbs you'd find in sentences. In Greek they all begin the same way with definite articles and they're all these short punchy lines that sort of roll from one line to another with this poetic rhythm.

Let me try and demonstrate it as closely as I can with an alternative translation. This will come up on the screen and I'll read it out. So you can get a feel for a little bit of what this feels like, this section and how it holds together.

Can we grab that up? Okay, here we go. So this is a bit what it feels like reading it in Greek. In brotherly love devoted to one another, in honour going before one another, in zeal not lacking, in the spirit fervent, the Lord serving, in hope rejoicing, in affliction enduring, in prayer persisting, for the needs of the saints sharing, hospitality pursuing.

I think Bible translators would even be justified in laying out these verses as a poem as I have there, but you can see they're grouped together in pairs and triplets. We've got two pairs, pairs in verse 10 and 13, triplets in verse 11 and 12 in the middle.

And the reason I've called this section love's dimensions is because the pairs on the frame, they're about love on the horizontal plane, but those two triplets in the middle, they introduce a vertical dimension in our relationship with God.

[22:56] So let's think about each of these four verses. I'm going to go back to the ESV translation so we can take that down, Luke, but we'll go with the ESV translation.

Let's think about each of these four verses. Firstly, brotherly love in verse 10. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honour. Now in the ancient Greco-Roman world, it was an honour-shame culture.

Honour was a core value. It's honour that was sort of elevated above everything else. Honour was a core value and honour was perceived as a limited good. So there was a limited supply of honour. That means if someone else got more honour, you kind of went down in honour. One scholar describes it this way, nearly every interaction with non-family members has undertones of a challenge to honour.

Essentially, especially if you're a man, relationships between most men in the ancient world were competitive. relationships between friends were at best mercantile.

[24 : 12] There was this sort of, there had to be a balance of give and take. But relationships between brothers were different. That was the one place where there was kind of no, well at least in ideal, there was no competing, there was no rivalry.

Of course, in practice it may have differed, there may frequently have been rivalry, but that was the ideal. So here's how one moralist and essayist philosopher named Plutarch writes about it in an essay called On Brotherly Love.

He says, a brother should not like the pan of a balance, incline the opposite way and be lowered when his brother is raised. You know, it's like scales.

He's saying with brothers it doesn't work that way. So normally in relationships it does, like honour goes up and down, but not with brothers. Not with brothers.

Instead, Plutarch says brothers are like two numbers multiplied together. Like two numbers multiplied. If you increase either of the numbers, the total increases. So in the ancient world, in the ancient Greco-Roman world, for a man to have a brother, that was probably the closest relationship you'd have in life.

[25 : 28] It was a kind of oasis, this one purely non-competitive relationship in the midst of a sea of rivalry and competing for honour.

The one relationship where you wouldn't be diminished by the other person being elevated, where you need not concern yourself with trying to win honour from them, but you could rather seek to bestow honour upon them.

And it was the rarity of that relationship that made it so special. If you were fortunate you might have one or maybe two brothers. But the Christian church did something radical.

Jesus said to his followers, you are all brothers, you're all brothers. With those words he subverted and inverted the society of his day.

In church relationships where you bestow honour rather than compete for honour became not the rare exception but the norm, the rule.

[26 : 36] You're all brothers. The second line in verse 10 captures that inversion of society. Outdo one another in showing honour.

If there's to be any competition it's not to get honour but to give it. Now as we've moved away from Christianity in our world our culture is becoming more and more competitive and more and more vicious when it comes to honour and shame.

And a lot of it's bound up with identity politics and so we see the kind of dynamics we see in our society is that people they identify with a particular subset of society and they want to see their identity honoured in the cultural marketplace honoured in sports and in media and on the screen and in the arts and in politics and alongside that wanting to see their identity honoured there's this vicious side that we see operating in our society where whatever identities we feel to be in competition with our identity we want to see them shamed and so there's this nasty delight we see when people fall and others pile on and shame them and cancel them and with this ugly and self-righteous glee we've become that well we're becoming that honour shame culture again competing but it's not to be that way among us for we're all brothers and sisters in

Christ if we are to compete let it be in showing honour in lifting up one another in celebrating others in serving others Lord God by your grace make this church an oasis of brotherhood in the midst of a vicious world but what's going to sustain this brotherly love for one another well verse 11 Paul says what sustains brotherly love is zeal verse 11 do not be slothful in zeal be fervent in spirit serve the Lord we need the vertical dimension to fuel the horizontal dimension now more often than not when I when I personally when I fail to love when I am being unloving often it's for no other reason that

I'm feeling weary and jaded and sick of the effort required when zeal falters love fails when I was a kid some of you will remember this some of you won't but when I was a kid there was an ad on TV for Duracell batteries and they had a bunch of pink bunnies playing the drums does anyone remember that ad yeah a few do great and you know the pink bunnies with ordinary batteries they all just sort of petered out and stopped playing drumming they ran out of juice but the battery the bunny that had a Duracell battery well it kept on going our relationship with God is the battery we need for love we need to draw close to God if we are to keep drawing close to one another I think spirit in be fervent in the spirit it's sort of in parallel to

[30 : 43] Lord the Lord Jesus in the third line there of verse 11 be fervent in the spirit serve the Lord so the second line saying let your heart be set on fire by God's spirit that's what's going to sustain our zeal let your heart be set on fire by God's spirit and if that sounds a little abstract how do I even do that how do I let my heart be set on fire by God's spirit well the third line makes it more concrete serve the Lord focus on Jesus the Lord Jesus his example his teaching what he wants what he commands Jesus said in John 14 if you love me you'll keep my commandments and he said in John 15 this is my commandment that you love one another if we want zeal that does not falter and hearts set on fire by God's spirit we need to keep looking to Christ and being renewed in our love for him we need zeal for love well if verse 11 addresses one reason our love can fail which is when we're spiritually running on empty it seems to me that verse 12 might address another reason why love can falter and that's because of suffering verse 12 rejoice in hope be patient in tribulation be constant in prayer now when the storms swirl around us it's hard to see beyond our own trouble when we're stooped over with a heavy burden we have little strength left to help our neighbour with his but in verse 12

Paul gives us three things we can do when we're suffering the first thing we can do is we can rejoice in hope we can rejoice in hope when you're suffering rejoice in hope every awful thing you're facing whatever it is every awful thing you're facing whether it's sickness or poverty or loneliness or grief or malice or slander whatever awful thing you're facing you can look at it straight on and say to it you are temporary you're with me only a little while soon you'll pass whatever it is for our hope is certain we have the promises of God's word we have the first fruits of the resurrection of the Son of God from the dead we have the deposit of God's spirit guaranteeing the inheritance that is to come the night of tears is brief the day which is dawning is everlasting even in suffering we can rejoice for we have hope no even more than that in suffering we learn to rejoice in hope for suffering teaches us to hold more lightly to what's temporary and to look to what's eternal it's the first thing we can do we can rejoice in hope second thing we can do we can be patient in tribulation we can endure when we're afflicted

God is simply calling us to wait to wait for what is good well then let us wait and keep our eyes on the horizon the sun will rise!

they also serve who only stand and wait if that's all you can do if all you can do is be patient in tribulation well they also serve who only stand and wait but even so there is a third thing we can do we can be constant in prayer suffering can be for us a school of prayer when we have no strength of our own we turn to the one who is mighty who is with us who is good who is faithful our desperation teaches!

us to pray and so suffering may even open up for us a ministry of prayer for others too our own need drives us to pray but our prayers range far beyond our own need if you're in the midst of a season of suffering perhaps this verse is a verse for you to take to heart today rejoice in hope be patient in tribulation be constant in prayer when verse 13 Paul returns to the horizontal dimension with which he began a practical example and gives practical examples of the brotherly love that he calls us to in verse 10 so verse 13 contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality I've spoken about some of these ideas recently in my series of talks on God's mercy so I won't labour the point again now but let me simply observe that genuine love meets needs it meets the needs of others that's what love does including the need for hospitality now in the original sense mean having people over for dinner hospitality here meant providing a place for strangers and travellers to stay welcoming people into your home who had nowhere else to go it might be that in the current economic climate where people are experiencing housing pressure we need to keep this kind of hospitality on the radar it may at times be needed let me give you two examples of generosity

[37:13] I can think of from just recent weeks amongst us to encourage you one is on the Monday just past the public holiday a team of volunteers went to Rob and Marg's place to weed the garden and tidy up the yard it's something that I know had been causing Rob some anxiety and frustration because there was a lot of work to do and he was finding that physically he just couldn't do any more the work in the yard that he used to be able to do well how good it is that Rob and Marg were willing to ask for help and how good it was so quickly given what a blessing both to those who received and to those who gave so can I just encourage you brothers and sisters if you have practical needs that might be met by church here please let them be known now we won't always get it right there'll be times that we let one another down we're finite we're flawed but let if you have needs let them be known the presence of needs in the family of

God is not a bug in the system it's a feature God allows so that deeds of love may flow here's another example on the Thursday a couple of weeks ago when Alyssa was rushed to hospital a few days before her early delivery of Dotty well Alyssa's a florist and that Saturday she had a wedding that she was preparing the flowers for and all the flowers had been delivered but they hadn't been arranged into bouquets and table settings and whatever decoration whatever else was needed for the wedding a couple of sisters amongst us went to Alyssa's house on that Thursday night first to trim all the flowers but these sisters aren't florists so they got in touch with other believers who go to other churches who are florists and two other women went and joined them the next day on the Friday now with all the trim flowers to arrange them into all the decorations and bouquets love what a beautiful act of love meeting a need that arose amongst us contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality love's dimensions horizontal vertical love's adaptations

I've called verses 14 to 16 love's adaptations this section is a bit more loosely linked than what came before the section before is linked stylistically as I tried to show you the section that follows is linked thematically verse 14 to 16 are a bit more loosely linked but I think what they have in common is that each of the verses verse 14 to 16 describes a way in which love manifests itself according to the needs of the person before it so encountering different kinds of people and so expressing itself in different ways genuine love adapts because genuine love is other person centred it's concerned chiefly with the needs of the other person and in each of these three cases here the sinful tendencies of our heart might lead us in a different direction so let's look at each of them first to the persecutor love shows grace verse 14 bless those who persecute you bless and do not curse them here

Jesus words stand behind Paul's words Paul is I think self-consciously echoing the teaching of Jesus it was probably recognized by the Roman believers Jesus had said in Luke 7 I say to you who hear love your enemies do good to those who hate you bless those who curse you pray for those who abuse you now this is a familiar Christian teaching but in practice it is wild how can we bless those who persecute us us that would mean we refrain from hating them even when they hate us it would mean we want good for them even when they want evil for us it would mean that in the midst of being persecuted by them we're more concerned about what their act of persecution is doing to them than what it's doing to us we're more concerned about how their evil dehumanizes them than how their evil dehumanizes us

I remember reading the Bible with some non-Christian college students at uni who were considering Jesus they were thinking about Jesus and we got to this point about love for enemies and one of them just flat out rejected it no one could love their enemies now this is where love meets its greatest test now I haven't had many enemies in my life but I've had a few a few people who have it seems actively sought to belittle me diminish me and undermine the work I do when I think of a couple of them I actually can still feel my body tense up but to bless those who persecute us is not gritting our teeth and putting up with it because

[43:32] I gleefully know God will get them in the end that's not blessing them blessing goes beyond what Paul will go on to say in verse 19 about refraining from vengeance when you bless someone you're praying father forgive them you're praying the Lord bless you and keep you and make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you and the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace that's what your persecutor needs that's what your enemy needs and that's what genuine love would have you wish for and pray for for them there are at present a few prominent voices in the public square who are representing things Christians care about but who are I think poor examples when it comes to precisely this point not surprisingly when they stand up for something good in the public square they come under attack they're hated and despised and

lies are written about them and so on and yet sometimes

I think we're seeing people respond to such slander with bitter counter attack with mocking and belittling those who have persecuted them I think that's understandable but it's regrettable let that not be our way and pray for those who are you know at the front lines in the public square standing up for things that are good pray that they would learn to bless those who persecute them well the second adaptation of love is in verse 15 empathy rejoice with those who rejoice weep with those who weep genuine love shows empathy it enters into and shares the experience of others rejoicing and weeping are opposite extremes but they're both fitting in their time ecclesiastes 3 there's a time to weep and there's a time to laugh both are fitting because our experience of life in this world is mixed both goodness and brokenness are features of this world and so both goodness and brokenness are experiences in our life sometimes we delight in the goodness of creation sometimes we despair at the effects of sin love is so other person centered that it prompts us to feel what others feel may may may may with others. True love will multiply their joy by sharing it with them on the one hand or will provide comfort in Greece by sitting alongside them in the ash heap. And as I think about my life, some of the most touching and memorable experiences of love I have had have been when someone has done one of those two things for me. The third adaptation of love in verse 16 is humility. Live in harmony with one another.

Do not be haughty but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. In Greek, each of the three lines in this verse uses a particular word for thinking, for our thinking.

Love adopts a mindset of humility. Love fits in with others rather than demanding its own way. Love rejects pride.

[47 : 50] Love never pulls rank or flaunts worldly status. Love never boasts. Love never imagines itself superior to others. Love respects the worth and value of others, whoever they are, and draws near to those whom the world might despise.

Now as I think about love's adaptations here, grace, empathy, humility, as I think about these adaptations of love, or as we think about them, I wonder if you've noticed how perfectly each of these three verses describes the Lord Jesus.

Each verse describes an adaptation or an accommodation that God's love has made for us. grace, grace, because God has blessed enemies.

He's forgiven those who persecuted him. More than that, in Christ, the Son of God has died for enemies.

Grace, empathy, well, God has entered into our suffering in the person of Jesus Christ, sharing in our suffering, taking on himself actually the suffering that was ours, the burden of our sin and shame.

[49 : 31] And humility, well how beautifully embodied in Jesus, eating with tax collectors and sinners, associating with lepers, with the poor, with the despised. More than that, the whole experience of Jesus coming, the incarnation, God the Son, lowering himself, becoming a man, becoming a servant.

Grace, empathy, humility, the love God calls us to, mirrors the love he has already shown us. and this kind of love, genuine love, will ultimately win the victory over evil.

We're out of time, but just look at verse 21. Paul says, this follows further elaboration of the teaching about not taking vengeance and about love for enemies.

Paul says in verse 21, do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. One of the dangers of evil, one of the dangers of suffering evil, is that we ourselves will be twisted by it.

That, that, that evil will make us evil. As if we, we need any additional help in that department. But Paul says, don't be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

[50 : 59] I've recently been reading a biography of Martin Luther King, the, the mid-20th century African-American Baptist preacher and civil rights leader. Now, in, in Martin Luther King's personal life, he had some major personal failings that I, I think it's kind of hard to look past.

But one thing he absolutely understood from the Bible and from the example of Jesus is that you cannot overcome hatred with hatred. And you cannot overcome evil with evil. You only overcome love.

You only, only overcome hate with love. And only, good can overcome evil. And, King lived that out personally.

So, one convention he was speaking at in Birmingham and Alabama in, in 1962, a, you know, he's just speaking and a man, a, a, a tall, powerfully built white man who was sitting in the sixth row hopped up, jumped onto the stage and just punched him twice in the face.

And instead of resisting Martin Luther King, just, he dropped his arms and as people grappled him and, and took him away, he said, don't touch him. We need to pray for him. And he called on African Americans to, to do the same.

[52 : 18] The demonstrations and marches that he organised were non-violent demonstrations. He taught people to accept insults and hatred and violence and imprisonment as he himself did multiple times.

To respond to hate with love. And eventually it worked. The ugliness and evil of racism was exposed for what it was.

Civil rights legislation was passed in the United States and segregation that had remained in place for almost a century since emancipation began to be broken down.

Well, God himself won us the same way. God won us not with hate but with love.

God overcame our evil with his good and our hatred with his love. So, brothers and sisters, as those who have been saved by God's love, let us learn to love as he loved us.

[53 : 32] let love be genuine. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the lengths your love went to to reach us in the sending, the giving of your Son for our sins.

And so, Father, teach us to love in all the ways described in this passage and many more. that our love might be a mirror that reflects your love.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.