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February 7, 2016

ROMANS 12:10

Romans Series: How God Changes People

[PRAYER] Lord, as we pray we come into your presence in a way that's different than the presence that exists all around us all the time, we know that there is nowhere we can go to escape your presence. You're always around us, you're ever-present, you're omnipresent (as we would say in theological terms). But as we come before you and pray, there's a way in which we come into your presence in a more meaningful and connected way. We want to take advantage of that in our lives more often than we do. So we ask you to prompt us. Remind us to pray. Encourage us about the power that comes from that prayer.

Lord, we thank you that you are a good, good Father, a Father that loves us and cares for us. No matter what we've done, no matter what mistakes we've made in our past, you love us, you care for us. That is the picture that we need in our own lives. Lord, teach us what that looks like every day as we live our lives. Teach us how to experience your forgiveness and to forgive ourselves for the things that we've done wrong. Teach us how to experience not a self-esteem but a God-esteem that we feel like we can lift our head up high because of what you have done for us and how you care for us daily. Lord, we trust you with our lives. And that's a big statement that we make. Because a lot of us are control people. We like to be in control and trust is a hard thing. So Lord, we trust you. We thank you for your goodness.

Heavenly Father, now as we open your word, we're asking you to teach us, as you do regularly, that you would inspire us, that you would convict us, that you would prompt us, and lead us, and guide us in ways that we haven't been before. That you would give us something new and fresh that we can take away with us today as we go home. In Jesus' name, amen.

Would you please open your Bibles to Romans 12. As we are going through in Romans 12:9-21 there are ten things, proactive things, that we do as Christians and ten reactions that we have as Christians. We're taking them nice and slow. We're going to look at Romans 12:10 today.

Now these twenty things in Romans 12 are evidences of a person's faith. In fact you might even use these as a report card on yourself. How am I doing in these things? Or you might say as a Christian these are things I'm working on in my life.

But I want to make it clear today that these aren't the things that make a Christian. The thing that makes a person a Christian is accepting Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. So I don't want you to go away from here today thinking that if you put on the mask of these twenty things that

somehow that makes you a Christian. These twenty things are real things that are genuine inside of our hearts when we have Jesus Christ living in our lives and they move us forward.

We're going to look at some theology as we go through and we're going to learn some important theology about the church today. But we're also going to understand some practical ways that we can implement this in our own lives.

So we're going to look at verse 10 of Romans 12 and look at the first part of that verse, which says this: *Be devoted to one another in love.*

Be devoted to one another in love. Now you might think this is a repeat of verse 9. If you look at verse 9 it says, *Love without hypocrisy.* Or maybe your version – *love with all sincerity.* You might say, "Why is he repeating that same idea here?" It's not the same idea. It's completely different. Let me help you understand why.

In the first verse in verse 9 where it says *love without hypocrisy*, the word there is *agape* love. That's a very special kind of love and it's not used in verse 10. Verse 10 is a whole different idea about love. We translate it the same and you might miss this if you don't understand the Greek words behind it, but the word in verse 9 is *agape* which has to do with sacrificial love.

I was working in my counseling with a young person who gets very annoyed with things in life. She just gets really annoyed. She gets really upset and angry about these annoyances that she experiences. So she and her parents and I have been working on tolerance to help her develop this.

Her mom reported to me this last week that one of the most significant conversations we had was the one I had two weeks ago with her after I taught about this verse 9 (*love without hypocrisy*) and *agape* and what that means for us. I shared that with her in the counseling session.

Let me explain to you what *agape* love is. Because *agape* love characterizes you as a sacrificial person that's able to put up with things from other people in ways that you wouldn't otherwise. That *agape* love comes from the power of the Holy Spirit, according to Galatians 5. It's the fruit of the Spirit.

She grabbed onto that because she's a very spiritual young lady. She grabbed onto that idea and it changed part of how she interacted and it helped her to be more tolerant of the annoyances around.

I think that's the practical application of Romans 12:9. *Love with sincerity.* It's not something that's hypothetical or theoretical. It's something that's very real and practical as we're living our day in and day out as we're taking Jesus home into our homes and into our workplace, into our environment and we're learning what *agape* love looks like. That's verse 9.

But in verse 10 it's a completely different word. I want you to see the word in verse 10 because as you see it it's going to make more sense to you. It's the word translated in these ways.

In Romans 12:10 the NIV translates it *devoted*. That's the word we're looking at first. There's another word at the end, the word *love*, and that's the second word we're going to look at as well. The first word is *devoted* there. In the ESV the word is *love*. They just put the word love there. In the King James Version it says *kindly affectioned*. You must be thinking well what is this word?

The word *devoted* there is the word *philostorgos*, which comes from two Greek words for love. The first one is *phileo*, which is a brotherly love, which is also going to be used. That's the word love at the end. We'll come to that in a minute. But it's *philo* and *storge*. So *philo* is brotherly love and *storge* is family love. So the idea here is this is a love that you would be characterized if you were in a family.

Now I know there are a lot of families that are dysfunctional today. So if you're looking at your family and you're saying, "Well we don't have that kind of love," don't think about your family. Think about how a family should be. This family love that God would have for us because this family love that He designed for a family is what He's saying now is part of the church.

This word *philostorgos* is only used one time in the Bible and it's used right here. It's an idea of a commitment kind of relationship that you're devoted. That's why the word devoted in the NIV is used there. Because in a family you're committed to each other. There's a sense of relationship that exists there. And that commitment emulates an earthly family.

But he's giving instructions to the Romans, the Christians there. He's telling them that one of the things that's going to characterize you as a believer is that you're going to be devoted to one another in love. You're going to have this commitment that exists in your relationship with others.

Now let's go to the second part of the verse because that other word *love* there is brotherly love or *phileo*. And this *brothers* as it's supposed to be are two guys who have things in common. They enjoy hanging out together and they spend time together. They're the brotherhood. That's the idea that's being described here. So he's saying be devoted or have a family kind of love with those people you have in common that are part of the fellowship.

What do we have in common? We have the Holy Spirit in common that draws us together. So even though we're very diverse people, that we come from different economic backgrounds, different genders, we come from different age groups, different life stages, we can come together and we can experience this family kind of love together where we're committed to each other.

Do you want to view yourself as a Christian? I am committed to God's family. That's part of who I am. It's this idea that we have a relationship, not only with the head of the body but a relationship with the members in the body. That's what we're talking about here.

So here's the takeaway I think that we're going to leave with today. This is what I come away from this passage with – that every Christian needs to be committed to a fellowship, to a church. If you're visiting from another church today when you go back to your church, take this back with you and be committed to that church. What is that going to look like for you?

Now every church has problems. There's no perfect church. So some churches you go there and you get a little bit frustrated with the church because they might talk too much about hell. Or maybe they talk too much about money. Or maybe they don't go deep enough into whatever. There's lots of imperfections. There's hypocrites in every church. In fact if you find a perfect church, don't go there because you'll ruin it. There are no perfect churches.

We want to make sure we understand that, but there is a responsibility that every Christian needs to be committed to a fellowship. That's part of our identity. This isn't just something we do on the side. This is who we are. We are Christians. That means we are connected and that determines a lot of who we are and what we're doing in life. So that connectedness is very important.

The love that's described I think is described well in 1 John when he says – *This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.*

It was fun the other day when the men came over to my home for a meeting for me with the men of Calvary Chapel. I asked people to introduce themselves. I didn't tell them how to do it, but here's how the men introduced themselves. "Hi, I'm Joe Shmoe and I sit on the left side." Or "I sit on the right side." It was kind of interesting...because we are connected in part by where we sit.

I noticed that Mike and Nancy have chosen to sit in a different place this week. I always think of them over here, but now they've moved over there. Maybe they're getting to know a different group of the church over there. I don't know. But there's a sense in which we identify ourselves with even a place where we sit in the church.

It's just fun to know what it means to be committed to a fellowship. So I think we have to ask a very important question about this idea of being committed to a church fellowship. This is a theological question that has practical implications for us who are pastors. The application is this: Do we have church membership at Calvary Chapel Living Hope? The answer to the question is yes. We have church membership.

Now why is church membership important theologically? Let me just help you understand this because I want you to see the assumption made by these passages that church membership (membership in the sense of being committed to a fellowship) is important because how would you do these things in these verses.

In Hebrews 10:24-25 it says – *And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

Or let's go to another verse. Hebrews 13:7 says – *Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.* How are you going to do that unless you're together and you're committed to a group?

1 Corinthians 12:24-16 says – *But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.* So there's this connectedness that takes place because of our commitment to a particular local fellowship, a local church.

1 Peter 5:2 gives instructions to pastors. *Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve.*

How are verses like this going to take place unless there's a commitment of those people to that fellowship? So the principle here in Romans 12:10 is that we need to have this family-like commitment to the folks in that fellowship. We're with them. We're connected to them. And that connection is an important part of who we are.

So do we believe in church membership? The answer is yes. Believe in church membership. In the Bible you're never going to see a lone-ranger Christian running out there on his own. All the apostles as they're writing are tying these back to the local church where people are understanding how to put it into practice.

John MacArthur says it this way. He says, “In a day where commitment is a rare commodity, it should come as no surprise that church membership is such a low priority to so many believers. Sadly, it is not uncommon for Christians to move from church to church, never submitting themselves to the care of elders and never committing themselves to a group of fellow believers.”

The challenge that I think we find many times in a church is that the church becomes this place where people experience benefits of some kind and if the benefits don't match their investment then they go find benefits somewhere else. And sometimes we as churches have our advertising campaigns to try to promote our current program so people from other churches come around. And so churches become this place where people migrate from one place to another and often don't land somewhere.

I think that's a mistake and misses the idea that's taught in Romans 12:10 – *Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.* Which brings us to a problem in church government or church leadership. The problem is this. Where's the list? Do we keep a list of those people who are members?

You know, if you are in a Baptist church it's very important to have a list. That list is very important and you want to keep that list pure because the list determines who gets to vote. In a Baptist church the polity in a Baptist church is that the congregation has the final say. It's a democratic form of government and so the church votes on particular issues and decisions that

the church needs to make. There's nothing wrong with it. God doesn't give the church a specific form of government. He leaves that freedom out there.

If you're in a Presbyterian church then the Presbytery has the elders have this decision-making power that's made for the life of the church.

I don't know if you know this, but in a Methodist church there's some upper echelon people in the denomination that even decide when it's time for a pastor to move on. They move the pastors around in the Methodist church.

So different churches have different polity. If you're in a Baptist church then you have to have church membership. You have to have a list and that list will determine who gets to vote and who doesn't get to vote at the business meetings that they have or the congregational meetings that they have.

Now in Calvary Chapel, since you're probably wondering, well what do we do? At Calvary Chapels, we don't have the eldership form of government or the Presbyterian form of government, nor do we have the Baptist form of government. What we have is this and I'm going to explain this to you in ways that come from I think in a biblical perspective. Not that the others aren't biblical, it's just this is how Calvary Chapels do it.

In the scriptures this is how we see leadership take place. God chooses a man or a person (man or woman). God chooses a person and He gives that person a vision and He brings people around that person and gives that person a message and then leadership starts to move forward. We see that with Joseph, we see that with Moses, we see that with Daniel, we see that with Esther. Continually in the Bible we see God raises up a leader. We see God is doing something in that person's heart, and God brings people around, gives that person a message, often takes that person through a wilderness experience to prepare them to lead and then they're able to lead.

So in the Calvary Chapel, what tends to happen is that a pastor or someone who wants to be a pastor decides to do a Bible study somewhere and then we see whether people come to that Bible study.

When I was talking to Joe Focht about our church and maybe starting a church, the issue of money came up about whether... I don't think I brought it up, but I think he wanted to make this clear – that we don't fund churches like this. He says this is why. If God's in it, you won't need any money. And if He's not in it, then I don't want to be wasting ours. So we'll not be giving you any money to start your church.

I think that's great. I really like that concept because there are three things that make a leader, a pastor according to the Bible. One is that they have a desire (according to 1 Timothy), the person has a desire to be a pastor. It talks about that. Desire is important. The second thing is that God has this stamp of approval on this person and has called that person in that position. Now I got to tell you, there's a lot of people who think they have those two things. They think they have the call of God and they have this desire, but they don't have the third thing. That is people who

want to follow. So all three of those things come together in order for leadership to take place biblically, I think, in a church. That's how we operate at Calvary Chapel Living Hope.

But this is what makes it very interesting. Because the pastors in Calvary Chapel are looking for the same thing among the congregation as well, saying, "Who has a vision for something? Is God raising you up to do something?" The ideas and the programs don't come from committees like they do often in a Baptist church where you have the Christian ed. committee and the outreach committee and so on. But rather you have ideas that come up from the grassroots because God is raising someone up. While we may throw something in the bulletin and we might say, "Hey, we're thinking about doing this idea over here, anybody want to do it, support that person," it's really interesting to see how God works in the midst of that.

Now I've taken a diversion from the idea of church membership or being committed to membership. But I wanted you to understand why in some churches they have a list and why we don't. The reason we don't have a list is because if we created a list, the list would be obsolete the next week because membership, church membership is in your heart.

How do we know whether to keep someone on the list if they haven't been here for six months? Does that mean they should be taken off the list? Or is it three months? Or maybe they haven't come for six months because they have some problem, but they still consider this their church and we're ministering to them.

The definition of church membership is a commitment of someone's heart to that church. We don't know and I don't know exactly where everybody's hearts are. There may be a point where you decide that it's best for you to go over to one of the other good churches in this area. I can recommend them to you. GraceWay is an amazing church. Princeton Alliance is a beautiful church. I would recommend those other churches should you be looking for another church. But I would hope you would stay here and grow with us, as God is doing some significant work in our lives and in my life. You bless me by being here and God is using you in my life and in the lives of other people to do that.

So we don't have a list. The closest thing we come to that is a church directory. But believe me, that is not a list. That has unsaved people on it, mates of other people. It's just an identification list so you can contact other people. It's not like the Lamb's book of life. So please don't rely on the church directory to get you into heaven.

I wanted you to understand a little bit more about church polity because I want you to understand about membership. The fact that we don't have a list, does that mean that membership is not important? No. Membership is important and membership matters. It's in your heart and it's something that God has designed for us I am convinced.

And so John Piper writes this. He says, "Church membership is a blood-bought gift of God's grace. More than most of us realize, it is a life-sustaining, faith-strengthening, joy-preserving means of God's mercy to us. I urge you not to cut yourself off from the blessing."

Now I don't think people are against membership in general. After all, Costco is doing very well. But I think people often misunderstand what membership is when it comes to the church. So I want to find this a little bit. Because sometimes it's like this. People will say something like, "Oh, you ought to try it and see if you like it." It's almost like eating spinach. Try it and see if you like it. No wonder people aren't signing up for membership when you have that kind of an attitude toward church membership.

I would suggest that the biblical picture of membership is a picture of community. It's not like Costco where you pay a fee in order to get some benefits. You check out the benefits to weigh out are the benefits good enough for me to pay the fee? And if they are then I'll go ahead and sign up for membership for Costco. But if I find out that Sam's is better, I'm going to skip Costco and I'm going to sign up for the Sam's benefit. That idea of membership that is I'm going to pay a fee in order to get some benefits I think is a poor analogy to describe membership in God's church.

When we talk about membership in God's church it's a little bit different word for member, I think. It's the same word, but it takes the idea of the body parts and we are members, that is, we're connected. We're a member of the body. There's a sense of community that's taught in the New Testament that we become part of. It becomes part of our identity that when we say "I belong to that church" is a statement saying "I am a member there." You can even say that. You can use that word I want you to know. You can say, "I'm a member at Calvary Chapel Living Hope." That's official language that we use here. You don't have to be on a list somewhere.

In fact, I'll know whether you are a member or not because you'll start changing the way you talk. Instead of saying to me, "I came to your church because..." you'll say things like, "I came to my church because..." You'll change your vocabulary. Because it's not my church. Oh it is my church, believe me. I love this church. It's my church just like it's your church. We're all connected here because I have made a commitment to this church and I love this church.

The Bible doesn't say that the church is like a body. It says the church is a body. That we are all members together, connected in this body. This connectedness I would like to use the word member more like a medical term. That my arm is a member of my body. If it were to be cut off there would be a lot of pain and heartache. There's a sense of connectedness that exists there that's very important. That connectedness is strategic, I'm convinced, for our spiritual health. It's an identification factor for you and me.

You want to be connected to a fellowship, not just attending every once in a while or visiting all these different places, and like a bee finding the best pollen and creating your own honey. That's not what the church is about. The church is about coming together and connecting yourself to a place and investing in this imperfect place, whatever that church is, that imperfect place, and growing and developing in that church environment.

Today's western culture being separated from the body of believers is not tragic. In fact it's more normal that people are separated. It's almost understood and it's a statement of our independence. Now I think independence is good, but when it comes to the church where there is a dependence that we must learn. There is this interdependence that takes place in the midst of

the church. When that takes place good things happen in a person's life. Whether you're getting together with a group of women and they're getting together and studying something and interacting together, good things happen in the midst of that. Sometimes we go through struggles in our lives. And it's all the more important that we're connected in those moments.

Don Brien asked if he could share a testimony with you and I felt like this just fits right into what we're talking about here – how God worked in his life over the last year. So Don, why don't you come and share for just a minute what God has done in your life and then I'll continue on.

[Don] Okay it's green. I was told this isn't a baton, so I have to hold it like this. I'm going to sit down to steady myself. I wrote some things down. Joel is really nervous right now. But that's okay.

We've been coming to this church for about eighteen months, so January of last year. So January 2015 I was looking at life and I was pretty.... I had a lot of doubt, a lot of fear, and a lot of stress coming up. So much so that I had to make a conscious decision (and Fred knows what I'm talking about), I need to separate my ammunition from my weapons. I was in that state of mind where I wasn't thinking of killing myself, don't get that idea, but man I was thinking I got so much stress going on right now, I may just load something and just start shooting out a wad or something.

I was facing twenty-eight years of being in the military and in January I knew that was going to end in a couple months. So all the security that went with that was coming to an end. I had a wedding coming up for my daughter, which is a good thing, but any parent who's wed their daughter, it can be a little bit stressful. Just a little bit. Right, Rich? Just a little bit. High school graduation – that was a miracle. It did happen. Thank you, Joel. And I had two college graduations coming up.

I knew in January I had no idea where I was going to live after July. I had no idea where my kids were going to go to school. I had no place to live, no job prospects. It was affecting my health. I had a lot of fear for my kids' future, for my family's future, and just providing for my family.

But I did have my wife and my best friend. She was ever-strong, but she was kind of having some of the same stresses I was for whatever reason or another. The prospect of we had a steady paycheck for twenty-eight plus years and it's coming to an end and we have no idea where we're going to live. We want to change schools, we want to get in a good school for the kids. We didn't know a lot about the future.

I did have God and I had this church body that God was working through. But Carla and I saw some of the great examples that were going on here of people living out God's word in their daily lives. It really affected us. So we made a choice in January and February of last year – we're going to move and we're going to move closer to this church to be involved in this church more. We didn't know where, we just knew it was going to be closer to this church. So we had a little step of faith and we wanted to see where it would go. We still didn't know where we were going to live or what job we were going to get, but we were encouraged to step out in faith, to move on.

We were encouraged by our examples that we saw in this church of doing even more. We give a lot to charities and tithe and stuff like that, and we decided hey, you know, my paycheck is going to get cut to like 40% of what it is, but we're not going to reduce any of our charities, any of our tithing support. And it kind of scared me, but we still did it. And I had a lot to learn about myself as well I found out.

I did get into my prayer life a lot more last year and I read the Bible more than I ever did before. I started going to a Bible study on a regular basis, tearing apart God's word (not a topical study). I had the opportunity to lock a lot of shields with other men to encourage each other and to grow in faith.

It really affected me and God is faithful. God has provided for my family and for myself. Found a house, a great house about a mile from here, which is nice. It gave me some part time work, my wife and I, when we needed it. And gifts at the right time, right when we needed it. We had a lot of encouragement, support, advice, training, being a better parent, a better husband, a better father. And we had some amazing examples to show us how to deal with house concerns, some folks that are going through this in our church, extended families, special needs families. Roberto Hernandez, he just amazes me. What he and his wife do and what they do for their child and the love that's in that family. There's a lot of things that I don't think I could ever handle.

So I've grown. Made a lot of mistakes. Not where I want to be yet. But I've worked on a lot of things. I'm trying to be a better father for my sons. I have grown in my faith. It's been hard to step out in faith sometimes, but it's also important to do so. Really it's the example of this church that has allowed me to do so and I thank you all for that. I ask God, I wanted to give this little testimony.

I really wanted to thank some men for encouraging me, so I'm going to name them off here. If I miss your name, I'm sorry. Tim, Tim, Tim, Mike, Mike, Pete, Pete, Chris, Dan, Dave, John, John, Rob, Rich, Scott, Frank, Frank, Frankie, Doug, Roberto, Matt, Ed, and Fred, and all the rest of them. This church has a depth of understanding, I think, to apply God's word to our daily lives and I'm very thankful for that.

[Applause]

[Scott] We don't have a list of people's names because membership is in our heart. We also don't have a list that defines what membership is. Oh the Bible has a lot of commands and ideas for us about what membership looks like. But I wouldn't want to create "you got to be doing these ten things in order to be a member."

But here's what I would encourage you to do. Allow the Holy Spirit to work in your own heart. As you just say, "Lord, am I doing what I need to be doing at Calvary Chapel?" God will speak to you and He'll say, "Hey I want you to do more." Or maybe in some cases, "I want you to do less because you need to spend more time in your family and you're being overworked here at church." Allow God to speak to you in the midst of that.

Where do you start? Well just ask God to show you a need. As you look around, you'll find the need that ties into your spiritual gift. You'll see things that meet your particular abilities, and you'll say, "I think I can do something here," or "I'd like to help here." When that takes place, you'll start to be more connected. God will do good things inside of you.

I just think it's part of our growth experience. It's part of who we are, that we're not just individual lone-range Christians. We are people that are committed, we are people that are doing what Romans 12:10 says – *Be devoted to one another in brotherly love*. One phrase out of the Bible today. We didn't even get to the whole verse. Romans 12:10 statement about what it means to be a Christian, part of that is our commitment to a local church. May God use that to speak in your heart.

Now if you have not accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, that's your first step. When you do that then you become a candidate to become a member of God's church itself.

Would you stand with me and let's pray together before we sing.

[PRAYER] Lord, we do love to worship. We love to enjoy you and we love to experience the connectedness that we experience during worship. So we're going to worship you now and ask for you to just do that work in our hearts that you do. To take the truths of your words, cement them in. Convict us, teach us, grow us today. We love you, Lord. In Jesus' name, amen.