

# The Table Of Hospitality

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- [ 0 : 00 ]     Good morning. Hey, so there's a lot here. I'm going to go through it a little slowly, but the words are easy to understand. This is Romans 12, 9 through 21.
- Love from the center of who you are. Don't fake it. Run for dear life from evil. Hold on for dear life to good.
- Be good friends who love deeply. Practice playing second fiddle. Don't burn out. Keep yourselves fueled and aflame.
- Be alert servants of the master, cheerfully expectant. Don't quit in hard times. Pray all the harder.
- Help needy Christians be inventive in hospitality. Bless your enemies. No cursing under your breath.
- [ 1 : 04 ]     Laugh with your happy friends when they're happy. Share tears when they're down. Get along with each other. Don't be stuck up.
- Make friends with nobodies. Don't be the great somebody. Don't hit back.
- Discover beauty in everyone. If you've got it in you, get along with everybody. Don't insist on getting even. That's not for you to do.
- I'll do the judging, says God. I'll take care of it. Our scriptures tell us that if you see your enemy hungry, go buy that person lunch.
- Or if he's thirsty, get him a drink. Your generosity will surprise him with goodness. Don't let evil get the best of you.
- [ 2 : 04 ]     Get the best of evil by doing good. The second reading is from Matthew. Then Jesus went to work on his disciples.
- Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You're not in the driver's seat. I am. Don't run from suffering.
- Embrace it. Follow me, and I'll show you how. Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way.
- My way to finding yourself. Your true self. What kind of deal is it to get everything you want, but lose yourself?
- What could you ever trade your soul for? This is the word of our Lord. Thanks be to God. So today we gather to explore the theme of hospitality, focusing on the teachings and the examples of Jesus.
- [ 3 : 09 ]     So as followers of Christ, we're called to extend his love and welcome to all who cross our paths. In the reading that Louis read this morning, chapter 12, verses 9 through 21, the Apostle Paul provides practical guidance on hospitality, and its importance in the life of us as Christians.
- So let's take a look at these verses and see how we can mirror Jesus' hospitality in our own lives. This section in Romans is known as the love in action.

So if you want to know if you really love God more than anyone or anything, it'll be demonstrated in your love for others, for in your actions as well as your words.

We need to have genuine love for one another. That love should be sincere, without hypocrisy or pretense. The difficult part is figuring out what that love looks like.

I love my children. I love pasta. I love walks on the beach and iced tea and raindrops on roses and whiskers on kittens. There's lots of things that we love.

[ 4 : 24 ] And when we use that term love without defining it, without realizing what it actually means, it means nothing. It's not until we realize what love really is, what Christ's love is, that we can start to live it.

So there's a pastor who asked a group of four to eight-year-olds, what does love mean? So here's some of their answers. When my grandmother got arthritis, she couldn't bend over and paint her toenails anymore.

So my grandfather does it for her all the time, even when his hands got arthritis too. That's love. Love's when a girl puts on perfume and a boy puts on shaving cologne and they go out and smell each other.

Love is when you go out to eat and give somebody most of your french fries without making them, without making them, without making them, without making them, give them any of yours. Love is what's in the room with you at Christmas if you stop opening presents and listen.

Love is when mommy sees daddy smelly and sweaty and still says he's handsome, he's handsomer than Brad Pitt. You really shouldn't say I love you unless you mean it.

[ 5 : 46 ] But if you mean it, you should say it a lot. People forget. So these are all great examples and there's some real wisdom found here out of the mouths of children.

I remember when I was younger and this might be aging me a little, but there was a book on our bookshelf with comics and it was called Love Is. Adrian, thank you.

So love is making someone's heart smile. Love is someone who helps you reach for that unreachable star. Love is for sharing.

The author, Kim Casali, designed them from a series of love notes that she wrote her husband. She had everything laid out. And Paul does this for us in Romans.

And I was reminded today that Romans is kind of unclear and a little bit jumbled, so thank you, Louis. But our life is unclear. And jumbled sometimes.

[ 6 : 55 ] But what this comes down to is that we simply must love the way that Jesus loved. Love with our whole heart, our whole selves. Jesus exemplified that genuine love by welcoming sinners, outcasts, and the marginalized.

In church, it means it's not just the fact that we greet someone with a smile or we shake their hand or we give them a hug. That's not what real love is about, is it?

It's got to be more than that. And that's what Paul wants us to understand. That love must be sincere. When God looks for love, he looks at our hearts.

This genuine love must flow in two directions. First, Jesus says, love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.

And secondly, he tells us, love your neighbor as yourself. There's no buts, there's no ands, there's no ifs. In both of these, Jesus' standard is, be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

[ 8 : 08 ] God's not fooled if our love is no more than lip service. God knows when our kindness is little more than a cover for our bitter, jealous, greedy hearts.

God knows if we do good things for others, even though we'd rather not. God demands that we love him and that we love others with genuine, sincere, perfect love.

So here's your moment of self-examination. How are you stacking up? If we're honest, we must confess that we've not loved God as God demands.

And even the best we can do is tainted by sin. The perfect law of God reveals that if our salvation depends on our love, we are doomed.

But here's the good news. At just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for us. God demonstrated his only love for us in this.

[ 9 : 13 ] While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. When we were unlovable, wretched, rebellious enemies of God, he still loved us and loves us still.

He didn't just tell us about his love. He proved it by sending Jesus to live and to die for us. So if you want to see genuine love, look at Jesus.

He didn't just talk about helping those in need. He actually rebuked the proud. He comforted the hurting. He fed the hungry. He gave sight to the blind and life to the dead.

When his enemies showed their hatred by beating him and nailing him to a cross, Jesus showed his love by praying, Father, forgive them for they don't know what they are doing.

And then Jesus performed the greatest act of love in human history. He laid down his life to pay for the sins of not just his friends, but his enemies.

[ 10 : 16 ] Through faith, our lovelessness is covered by that perfect gift of love, that perfect life of love. love. That genuine love.

That genuine love from our God whose very essence is love. It's only when our faith is firmly fixed on God's perfect, genuine love for us will we be ready for Paul's answer to the question, what does that genuine love look like in our own lives?

Paul begins with, hate what is evil, cling to what's good. Love hates. Our world says things like a true friend will support you in anything that you want to do.

No. True love is discerning. A true friend will tell you when you're doing something foolish or dangerous. Genuine love will go further. Genuine love will tell you when you're doing something that threatens your eternal welfare.

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. In the Greek version of this, both Greek words describe the love which naturally exists between parents and children, brothers and sisters.

[ 11 : 33 ] Genuine love goes further than family relationships. It transcends them. It rises above them. While so much of the world's virtue is marked by division, black or blue, white or brown, which lives matter more than others.

Christ-like love shows the same tender, warm affection for brothers and sisters in faith as it does for blood relatives. Honor one another above yourselves.

Don't try to make yourself look better than other people. Genuine Christian love will fall over itself to give other people credit.

Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor serving the Lord. It's likely that many people intend to do some real good, but something prevents our good intentions from ever bearing fruit.

The same thing happens among Christians. We say that we'll pray for someone, but we forget. So if somebody asks you to pray for them, do it right then.

[ 12 : 42 ] We volunteer to help, but other things come up. So how do we overcome this? Well, a more accurate translation is be fervent in spirit.

The Greek word pictures a pot boiling over. So in order for us to love others, God must light a fire in our hearts. If we find our love growing cold, it's because we've strayed from that fire of God's love.

If we want to glow with love for others, we must be warmed by the love and forgiveness that God gives us first in both the gospel and in word and in sacrament.

Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. This applies primarily to how we run our race through life.

our certainty of salvation in Jesus keeps us steadfast and joyful when we face those storms and those trials of life. When trials come, we don't lash out or grow irritable.

[ 13 : 51 ] We patiently endure. And in all things, at all times, in all places, for all people, we pray. We turn over our problems and our concerns to God.

Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Genuine love doesn't wait to be asked for help and doesn't expect to be repaid.

Everything we have is God's gift to us. And we should take special care for what God has given us, especially with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse. Genuine love never wishes that something awful would happen to someone, even if they deserve it.

Genuine love hopes and prays that God would bestow rich blessings on those who persecute us. Why? Because our role models are not those celebrities who stand on stage and spew their empty, hypocritical outrage.

[ 15 : 04 ] Our role model is God and Jesus Christ. They gave us the perfect example of God's love, even for his enemies. In Matthew it says, he causes his son to rise on the evil and the good and send rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

Rejoice with those who rejoice. Mourn with those who mourn. this is one of the greatest joys and challenges of being a pastor. I get to share in your joys.

The birth of a child, a baptism, a marriage, a new job, the peace of forgiveness. But when you lose a job, when the doctor's report isn't good, or when death robs you of a loved one, it becomes my burden as well.

But I don't have a monopoly. Rejoice and mourn together. That's how we share one another's burdens.

We share it together. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

[ 16 : 20 ] There's no hierarchy in Christ's church. No one is any better or holier than anyone else. Scott and I are not better because we stand up here than any of you.

There's no elites, no 99 or 1%. There are only blood-bought sinners. Genuine Christian love is sincere, discerning, affectionate.

It's enthusiastic and patient, generous, and hospitable. It's marked by harmony and humility. And that's just here with the people in church.

But Paul's not done. Genuine love also looks out to a world filled with enemies. Do not repay evil for evil.

Do not take revenge. Do not be overcome by evil. Each of these phrases says the same thing in different words. retaliation and revenge are not in the Christian vocabulary.

[ 17 : 28 ] And our sinful nature doesn't like that. That's not fair. That's not the way the world works. When someone gets hurt, the perpetrator should pay.

That's why we have judges and juries. Justice must be carried out. And while Paul is not forbidding using the courts and rule of law to achieve justice, he is forbidding seeking personal revenge.

Because while revenge and retribution are the way of the world, they're not the way of Jesus and his disciples. The question's why.

Why shouldn't I flip off that guy who cuts me off on the highway? Why shouldn't I get even when somebody rips me off or betrays my trust? Why shouldn't I throw a temper tantrum when I don't think I'm being treated fairly?

Why shouldn't I unleash on the waitress for messing up my order? It's her fault. I have every right. No, you don't.

[ 18 : 34 ] Two reasons. First, do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath. For it is written, it is mine to avenge.

I will repay, says the Lord. Perhaps the most annoying part about some people is their arrogance. They think that they know better than anyone else.

They know better than you how you should think. And for Christians, revenge is an act of arrogance. It's nothing less than pretending that you are better than God.

So how many of you think that you know better than God? Good. Glad I don't see any hands up. It's not our job to take his place as judge.

God knows when you're wronged or when people do something wrong and he will carry out fuller and firmer justice than you ever could. either in this life through his representatives or in the next.

[ 19 : 43 ] We are not called to judge anyone but to accept them in love. Remember that earlier? Love thy neighbor? There's no buts or ifs in that.

Secondly, showing kindness instead of seeking revenge has the potential to bring out the best of all possible outcomes. If your enemy is hungry, feed him.

If he's thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head. Heaping coals on someone's head is a good outcome?

Yes. Burning coals are a picture of shame. Have you ever felt shame? That hot, that sick feeling that you get especially when someone's kinder, more patient, and more forgiving than you deserve.

That's that kind of heat that genuine love pours out onto the head of enemies. Our goal in repaying evil with kindness is not just to make someone feel shame, but hopefully to lead them to repentance and faith and salvation that is without a doubt the best of all possible outcomes.

[ 21 : 06 ] With God as our example and strength, we can pay back kindness for evil. And that's how genuine love is not overcome by evil, but overcomes evil with good.

The love Jesus acted as the foundation of his hospitality. Jesus' lesson at the Last Supper was clear. The meal for the kingdom of God is for all.

Saints, strangers, those who persecute and betray you, those who are joyful, and those who weep. The author of the epistle letter to the Romans reminds us and invites us to do as Jesus did.

Do not be overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good. in the words of Jesus, take up your cross and follow me.

This requires that we follow God's way in offering a good meal at God's table for all of God's guests. Jesus showed us the ultimate in hospitality through love and through the gift that we celebrate here each week.

[ 22 : 18 ] Each week we're invited to Christ's table. through holy communion we are nourished and sustained in our life of faith because we constantly need to receive God's grace in order to grow in holiness.

So not only did Christ lay his life down for us, but he commanded us to continue to receive the gift of grace and love through communion.

Our world today is in dire need of Jesus' hospitality. As his followers were called to embody his example and extend his love and his welcome to all, his hospitality knew no bounds.

He welcomed the sinners, the strangers, and even his persecutors with open arms. Through genuine love he exhibited a hospitality that transformed lives.

love. And as followers of Christ, we're called to emulate his example and extend his love to all who we encounter. Let us carry that message of Romans 12, 9 through 21 in our hearts and strive to be beacons of Jesus' hospitality, making difference in our neighborhoods, communities, and beyond.

[ 23 : 40 ] May the Lord bless us abundantly as we seek to reflect his love to the world around us. Mother Teresa had a unique phrase to describe this Christ-like love.

She once wrote, we must grow in love and to do this we must go on loving and loving and giving and giving until it hurts. Just the way Jesus did.

Do ordinary things with extraordinary love. Little things like caring for the sick in the homeless, the lonely, and the unwanted. Washing and cleaning for them.

You must give what will cost you something. Then your gift becomes a sacrifice which will have value before God. Any sacrifice is useful if it's done out of love.

This giving until it hurts this sacrifice is also called love in action. love in the love in the love. So I invite you all to walk as Jesus walked.

[ 24 : 46 ] Love the unlovable. Sacrifice something of value. Go all out and put your love into action.

Loving Father, too often our minds are distracted from Jesus into the things of the world, especially when times are difficult.

But we want to keep our mind on Christ, knowing that this is your best for us. We pray that we become increasingly aware of the spirits prompting in our lives, so that day by day our hearts and minds may become full with the love of Christ.

May his nature be reflected through our actions and attitudes. And may our lives be transformed daily, as we transform others.

Help us to prove in what your will is for us, so that we can carry your true love and goodness into the world. For your praise and glory and for the benefit of others, we ask this in the name of Jesus.

[ 25 : 56 ] Amen. So this table of hospitality requires so much of us. It demands we question our own boundaries of who's in and who's out.

It asks us to accept that the spirit may move in surprising ways, through surprising people, and we might just miss out on the beauty and fullness of life if we insist on limiting invitations to our feast.

Indeed, sometimes we couldn't even pass our own test for inclusion. salvation. The grace of God abounds. The invitation of Christ is wide.

The power of the transforming spirit will surprise us every time. So may the blessings of hospitality you find here go with you and move with you through to others, wherever you may go this week.

So let the people say amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.