

PRACTICAL LOVE

Romans 12:13

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Just a short word from the Lord to really focus in on only one phrase today. We'll briefly touch the second phrase in verse 13. We'll concentrate mainly on the first phrase. "Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality" (Romans 12:13, NIV).

Sunday evening service last Sunday we took time to look at love from three perspectives. We sought to provide a small group experience: a dictionary definition of love. Then we sought to apply to love a behavioral definition by asking the question, "What if Channel 7 Eyewitness News came out and photographed love in action in your family? What shot would they take?" Then the third way we had of looking at love is to ask, "Do you remember a time in your life when you really experienced love?"

As we come to Romans 12, we find Paul doing much the same thing that we proposed last Sunday evening. He starts out in verse 9 by saying, "Let love be genuine." And, thereby, supplies sort of the dictionary definition of love—that it's unhypocritical; that it's truly honest. Then, for the rest of Romans 12, he comes to the behavioral aspect of love.

Supposing, if you will, if we can put it into a modern setting, that Eyewitness News has heard that our church, the people, are a loving people. They want to show on their news what it is for a church to have love in action. We can then look at them to photograph in action these verses that are presented to us in Romans 12. The one today, especially, could be photographed rather easily as we're doing it: "Contribute to the needs of the saints, practice hospitality."

Last week in the Sunday morning service we looked at the theme of the person who was in trouble, in tribulation. We indicated that it is important to have an inward attitude to go through trouble. To realize we are to rejoice in hope, endure in trouble, be constant in prayer. But verse 13 added to verse 12 suggests to us that none of us go through trouble alone. That the church is

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really an extended family where love is behaved. When we meet, therefore, we spot one another's needs. And we are designed by God to help meet one another's needs.

James 2 puts it this way: "If a brother or a sister is ill-clad or in lack of daily food and one of you says to him, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,' without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit?" A person who is ill-clad and lacking food can be patient in trouble, can rejoice in hope, and be constant in prayer. But when you put them in the middle of the body of Christ, which is an extended family of brothers and sisters, then we want to help lift that person in the midst of their trouble. That goes for physical need. That goes for emotional need. And it goes for spiritual need.

The admonition today is, first of all to the needs of the saints, contributing. Or contribute to the needs of the saints. It's really interesting, as you look at the language which Paul employs, that, literally, if you were translating this verse it would read something like this: "To the needs of the saints, *koinonia*-ing," for the word for "contributing" here is the word found elsewhere in the New Testament, that term *koinonia*.

We have mentioned it already in the service today, but I'm going to spend some time today and probably bore you to death by tracing down the meaning of the word. But I really want to lay the basement for a while, or dig the foundation, so that at the end it will all of a sudden come together and really grasp what Paul is saying here about *koinonia*-ing to the needs of the saints. It is this kind of *koinonia* which the Early Church had. We find in Acts 2:44-45 all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all if any had need. Just as the word "need" is used in Romans 12:13 and *koinonia*, so both words are used in Acts 2:44-45.

I have long looked at Acts 2—probably from the same perspective that most of you have looked in here—and said, "Those early Christians sure did love one another, didn't they?" Kind of in an

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infectious burst of the Spirit, they just forgot the normal human reservations and went out and unloaded everything they had and gave it to one another and lived in a communal situation together. That's what it means, we think, when we read that phrase "all things in common." So before we jump at that and mistakenly assume that *koinonia* might be communal type of living, it would be instructive to see, as we go through the Book of Acts, that this is not even how the church in Jerusalem understood having all things in common, all things in *koinonia*. Rather, we find, as we go through the Book of Acts and carefully note what persons are doing, that it seems the kind of selling of houses and properties that are talked about in Acts 2 and 4 are those kinds of houses and properties which are not so much integral to one's own usage. If you will, they are one's surplus or investment types of usage.

For example we find Barnabas in Acts 4 being described as selling a field which belonged to him. Nothing is said about him selling his own personal residence. And Ananias and Sapphira came, and they had sold a piece of property and were going to give the proceeds of that to the church. Nothing said about their selling their own residence. In Acts 2:46, it says that day by day the early believers attended the temple together and were breaking bread in their homes. They were breaking bread in their homes after they have been described as selling their possessions and goods. So somehow, in the midst of selling their possessions and goods, they still had homes where they were living. It says in Acts 8:3 that Paul was ravishing the church and entering house after house—personal residences. And it says in Acts 12:12 that Peter, when he was released from prison, when he realized that the angel had set him free, went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and praying. That means, in spite of the fact that Acts 2 says they have all things in common, yet when we come to Acts 11 we find that Mary had a house that belonged to her.

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Philip, who was one of those in the early Christian community, is found later in Acts—Acts 21:8. When Paul comes to him, Luke says, “We departed and came to Caesarea and entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven.” And when Paul comes to Jerusalem itself, when he’s going to face imprisonment in Jerusalem, Luke says, “After these days we made ready and went up to Jerusalem, and some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us bringing us to the house of Mnason, from Cyprus, an early disciple.” Here’s a person, an early disciple, present perhaps in the Acts 2, Acts 4, setting, but he had his house.

So what I would suggest from Acts 2 and 4 is when we look at *koinonia* that it does not necessarily mean that in the Early Church, every person divested themselves totally of all ownership of private property. It does mean, though, that their attitude toward things changed. That they looked at what they had and what they weren’t using or needing, and they disposed of many of these things. And even what they kept for themselves was not regarded as their own, but was regarded, attitudinally, as belonging to the saints. Or, as Luke says in Acts 4, that no one any more looked at things as though they were their own.

The word *koinonia* expresses this kind of community. And the reason I’m taking some time talking about property and selling things is that if *koinonia* isn’t understood first of all on the financial level, I doubt if it can really be understood on the other levels of which the Scripture speaks of it—the sharing together of faith, the sharing together of common association, emotional support, and the like.

Koinonia expresses shared fellowship or community. From a legal sense, the word *koinonia* which is—at the root of *koinonia*—outside the New Testament, in the Greek language, to describe legal real estate. Such as we would call, in our day, joint tenancy, or common property, or joint ownership. For example, in Luke 5 Luke notes that James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were partners with Simon. They had a joint venture business together. Just as when I sign my

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title to the house, it is George and/or Jewel Wood. It is joint tenancy, joint ownership. That's *koinonia*. That's what Peter and James and John had, evidently, in their joint fishing venture.

This idea of something shared, something that's mine is yours, or we're in it together, is seen in the New Testament in a very real way, in a theological sense, about Jesus' union with us and our union with Him. It is said of Jesus, "Since, therefore, the children share [*koinonia*] they share in the flesh and bread." Also, "He in like manner took the same." He really became one of us and took the properties of life that belonged to us. But if He did that, then, to us, He has granted to us very great and precious promises—that through them we might become *koinonia*, partakers, of the divine nature. That the title to the divine nature, the ownership of the divine nature which belongs to God alone, is now through Christ shared with us, and we become partners with it. So the Scripture describes us as having a common faith, a faith we all have investment in and share together. It's not your faith, but not mine. It's our faith together. We have a common salvation. We share commonly in the divine nature.

In a very practical sense in the New Testament, we see in Acts 4, no one said that anything he possessed was his own, but they had everything in *koinonia*. I think that could be reflected as an attitude of the early believers. Since the New Testament writers are presenting the Church as an extended family of brothers and sisters, it's not hard to see how this happens.

For example, I am a person who is rather fussy about my toothpaste. I do not like the lid to be removed. I like to keep it on. And always, when I see it off, I know somebody's been into it and I say, "Who has had my toothpaste?" In family, that is a possession. Yet it's not. It's accessible to anyone that has need of it.

Or we might say, "Where are the keys to my car?" It may be the car that we particularly use, but that's not to say that somebody else in the family can't use it. We might even say sometimes in

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family, especially if you have separate incomes, “my money.” Yet in a real way, if we’re in family, what’s mine is yours. And if you need it, you can have it.

This perspective was practiced by the early Christians. I am becoming more and more convinced that the “all things in common” in Acts 2, rather than being an exception to the rule, in the Early Church it appears to be the rule itself. That wherever the Church was found, it considered itself as part of the extended family. Among the Jerusalem saints, they took the responsibility to care for one another. When the Jerusalem saints got in trouble and the saints up in Antioch some miles to the north heard about it, they shared. They took what they had and sent it down because they wanted to help the saints as they were heading into a famine. When the Jerusalem saints got in trouble again financially, it was the saints in the various parts of the Mediterranean world in the various churches that Paul had founded that shared of their assets so the Jerusalem saints could have enough.

I think if you start off with the term *koinonia* and don’t even talk about it so much from the spiritual sense or a supportive fellowship sense, but start out with a sense of property, the early believers had this attitude of, “What’s mine is yours if you need it.”

How do we put this into practice? Here’s where I want to focus most of our attention today.

There are two groups of people. In every community of Christian believers, there are those who have certain assets. And there are those who have certain needs. Scriptures present responsibility both for people in the Christian body that have needs and for those who have resources. In other words, the New Testament does not have the perspective that if you have a need, state it and people who have resources are obligated to meet it. No.

I. There are some very specific responsibilities that are given in Scripture for those who have needs.

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A. For example, Paul says of himself, a person who had stood in need when he speaks to the elders of Ephesus at the town of Miletus, he says in Acts 20:34: “These hands ministered to my needs and those with me.” He met his own needs. Paul, writing to the Thessalonians—who were all caught up with the idea that the Lord may come so we’re going to sit around and hold hands with one another, quit working, and wait for the Lord to come and not keep on planning and living like we’re supposed to—Paul writes them and says he wants them to aspire to live quietly. I once preached a sermon on this and called it, “Down to Earth Living for an Up in the Air People.” This is what he’s really communicating. “I want you to aspire to live quietly. Work with your own hands so you may command the respect of outsiders and be dependent upon nobody” (see 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12).

Paul again, in 2 Thessalonians 3:10–12, writes to the same believers saying, “‘If a man will not work, he shall not eat.’ We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat” (NIV). The need side.

There are people who have responsibility to provide. First to look at their own resources where those needs can be met. So for the thief who has been on the resource end of things and has been stealing from others, Paul had some choice advice in Ephesians: “Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor doing honest work with his own hands so that he may be able to share with those in need.”

So the first obligation to persons within the Body, as presented by the New Testament, is to look honestly within their own resources as to whether those needs can be met by their own resources. Are you working? Of course, this first point accords well with our American ethic of work.

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A second thing the New Testament does in regard to those who have need is to go on and indicate that when a person has done all they could and that need still is not met, there is another stage, which is the recognition of dependence on others in the Body.

B. A recognition of dependence. It's extremely difficult to admit need, especially financial need. To say, "I need help." We've been taught, and I think our churches tend to reflect our culture, that we're to be strong, that we're never to be weak. We take it as failure if we say we have a need. In some cases, that may be true. Many times it is not. I look at Jesus, for example, who on the way to the cross had real need as He went to the cross for someone to appreciate where He was at that moment emotionally, and to understand, when He was talking about His death, He really meant it. There is one person that picked up the clue and she said, "He's really going to die. He really is going to the cross." So she took an alabaster jar full of ointment, and she poured it upon Him. All the others who looked at these resources said, "That should have been used for something else." But Jesus, who had the need at that moment, simply set Mary at rest. He receives the gift which she brings to Him and does not rebuke her for it. One of the most difficult things, I think, that we have to do sometimes in the Body is learn to accept help, whether it's spiritual counsel, or emotional or psychological counsel, or just advice or financial need. And to not say, "You shouldn't be doing this."

One of the things that absolutely is a strong point with me is, because I am a pastor, a preacher, many people feel that when we go out to eat at a restaurant or something that because they're with the pastor, they're obligated to pick up the check. I always found myself fighting that. Like, "I'm a man and I earn money, too! They shouldn't always feel that the preacher's going to freeload on everybody." It used to bother me no end. I would always make a big thing about trying to grab that check or protesting if somebody else picked it up because I didn't want to be placed in a position of dependence. Then I read the story about how Jesus allowed someone else

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to minister to Him and didn't rebuke the woman and say, "Oh, no! You shouldn't have done that! Let me reimburse you for the oil." Not that at all. It's ok to receive help.

A third thing that occurs among those on the need side of Christian community. It's not only first to work, secondly recognize need for dependence when work and all effort cannot meet the needs which one has. But a third step then, especially in regard to financial matters.

C. Recognize the necessity for process. I mean that when there's just one or two persons in need in the Body, what happens is one person out of their group will simply say, "I see that person has a need," and on a one-to-one level transfer help, give it. But if within the church family there come to be many who are in need, then some system has to be set up so that there is equity, and some are not receiving more while others who have legitimate needs are receiving less. This requires process. In the New Testament, the way they handled this was they put in a group of people to replace the apostles and called them deacons. They became the filters through which the resource side of the congregation flowed to the need side of the congregation. The Early Church had basically two ways of contributing to the needs of the saints. One was on a person-to-person level, which we've just traced. But more frequently, the Church was doing it on a more massive level, which required them to be filters through some sort of process. In Jerusalem, the deacons did this. In ministering to the Jerusalem saints, the apostle Paul, with his companions, served as the filter for the funds as they were collected from the Gentile churches.

So we looked at three responsibilities of those who have needs.

II. Let's look for a moment at the responsibility of those within the body who have resources.

A. First of all, the responsibility to be involved. In Acts 2 and 4, when those on the resource side begin selling off their assets, there was no legislation. Here's where the Church can really make a mistake and say, "Everybody's got to do something."

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There is, within the body of the Lord, given the freedom for a person to evaluate where they're at and decide whether or not they're going to respond. Let no one, as Paul will tell the Corinthians later, give under compulsion. So there's never any legislation to tell people on the resource side, "Help people on the need side!"

On the other hand, in 1 John 3:17, John says, "If anyone has this world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?" And Paul says in Galatians 6:10, "So then, as we have opportunity, do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith."

Inevitably, when we become involved in the Body, which is this local church or any local church, to the level of our involvement—almost to that level—is the level of which we see needs within. So the first responsibility on this side is to recognize the responsibility.

B. The second responsibility is, perhaps I would say, a deeper recognition of the brotherhood of our family together—the fact that God has really called us to be brothers and sisters. Second Corinthians 8:15 says, in quoting a passage from the book of Exodus, "He who gathered much had nothing over, and he who gathered little had no lack." As each person looks at the level of their need versus the level of what they actually have, then the person with resources begins to say, "How can I channel this toward the body of Christ, towards the work of Christ?"

Of course, there are two ways that this can be done. One is through an outright gift. And the other is through investment, or long purposes, as ways of contributing to the needs of the saints. On the need side, what we really have is a person who, if their resources are to come to the level of their need, they must receive some sort of assistance.

I realize that we have a continuum of church. On a line of one to ten, let ten represent the Jerusalem church, which expressed perfectly what it is to get these in balance, so that persons who, after they evaluated their own needs and their own houses, gave to others so there was no

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lacking in the body. They would stand as a perfect expression. A totally selfish church would stand at the level of one. The mistake that sometimes is made in trying to get a church to move from one position to another is assuming it can be done overnight. I see in this body tremendous signs that this is happening, and there are more signs on the way. But we'll never come down that continuum just by snapping our fingers in one moment of time.

As needs began to develop in the Early Church, there became so many needs it was necessary for this filtering process of the deacons to take place in between, so that there could be the right administration of funds. In the Book of Acts, the apostles said, "It's not right we should give up serving the Word in order to serve tables." The word for "tables" is the same word that is used when Jesus overthrew the money changers in the temple. It doesn't mean that the deacons were actually, literally serving food at a communal meal. But by serving tables, it probably means that they were sitting at tables, which would be equivalent to banking tables or money exchange tables, and distributing the assets that had been given.

As time has gone along and we've looked at the Church where it is today and we've looked at this church, over a period of time, because we haven't felt it as much a responsibility to look at financial needs in the Body, the deacons more and more have become oriented in ministry towards the institution. So that they serve to care for the assets of the institution and the direction of the institution, instead of becoming a filter by which needs are passing through them to the Body. I'm looking at what I see as a biblical picture and where we could possibly be moving as a church.

As I look at our church body, these are some of the areas of need that I see. Let me highlight one area in particular. There are a lot of families within our church, and a lot of single individuals that fit into that category as well, who, if they had enough funds available to them for a down payment on a home, could quit renting and could get on with a more wise stewardship of their

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assets as to build a life that would have more potential in regard to their own person, and in regard to the work of the Lord as well. I've wanted for many, many years to have a Christian bank and to say, "All the Christians who have the assets, get together and pool them, either gift-wise or investment-wise, and find a way to transfer these in either a gift or loan to persons who are in need." I realize there are legal ramifications of this. And if you did it, it would have to be a form other than a bank. But just as a matter of prayer, wouldn't it be great if, instead of just concentrating as a church on what we're going to do institutionally, we could look at ways this church—as it grows and the Lord gives us ability—could help people?

We want to get a multi-million dollar facility, or something like that, and we want to call our people to sacrifice to make this possible. But just lay aside all that notion and say, "One of the things we want to do is really help our people. We want to minister to one another." It may be more important for families in our church to have their own home than it is for the church to have more spacious quarters. That may be an option we ought to be looking at. One of the things that we could be doing is use the structures we already have.

The deacons are those whom God would call to this ministry of stewardship so that there is a wise care of what assets the Body has versus what needs the Body has. You say, "If Channel 7 gets a hold of this, that there is a church that's crazy enough to help their own people make down payments, in three years refinance the home or sell it and turn the profit back, pay the loan back with interest, whatever." You could work all these things out. I don't want to get into details now. But if Channel 7 would come out and photograph this church, love in action, as one of the ways we love. We have all things in *koinonia*, in common, in that sense. "Wouldn't people start taking advantage of this? Wouldn't you have 'rice' Christians?" That was a term used in China. You give them a bowl of rice, and he becomes a Christian in order to get the bowl of rice. "Isn't that dangerous?" I agree. This is very dangerous.

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This is why you need this middle process. It gives tremendous understanding to me of Acts 5, Ananias and Sapphira. Somebody tried to take advantage of the system. It was, strikingly, not a person on the need side, but a person on the resource side, who tried to take advantage of the system. The Holy Spirit was perfectly capable of defending himself on that occasion, if you recall the story in Acts 5.

I'm brainstorming with you. I'm not saying this is the plan. I'm not saying I've got it organized out. But just saying I've really been seeking the Lord and asking, "What, Lord, would really please You, for us as a church body to be doing together? Would it please You more that we put up structures?" And it may very well be that God will call us to do that. But what if we get away as a church from the traditional concept in American Protestantism today—that we keep growing bigger and better—and instead concentrate as a church on the quality of life among us? Part of that aspect of quality may be involved in really helping one another. God may be calling persons within our church body that will have the keys to help us put this whole thing together and see something like this materialize.

What if, for example there is a younger, or an older person, in our congregation that feels called of God to begin a small business? And there are persons within that category within our church. They're reputable. They're solid people. Their life is on the line, their life is committed to the Lord. When you look at their balance sheet compared to going to a bank, they could never get off the ground. But if we had body resources to help that person, we could see something going. The Scriptures say "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35), and "Give and it shall be given unto you" (Luke 6:38). I really believe that if we made a commitment as a church to really help one another what's going to happen is the Lord will help us with all the needs that we have. It seems to me that this kind of thing is certainly New Testament. It's involved in the idea of what Paul is saying, communicating to the needs of the saints. That when a saint has a

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need—just as *koinonia* is a term for joint venture, joint partnership—when a saint has a need, people on the resource side have a need too. It becomes, at that moment, a shared need. A shared need then takes a shared resource.

On the resource side of the ledger, there is the recognition of responsibility. There is the deeper recognition of brotherhood. And again, these may shrink or expand depending on where the person is and what God has called them to do. I don't see any evidence in the New Testament where the Lord says everybody's going to earn the same salary, drive the same car, and live in the same house. I don't see that at all. I do see the Lord calling persons to different responsibilities in the Kingdom. The greater privilege one has, then the greater responsibility God calls them to.

With this the recognition of need, the deeper recognition of the brotherhood of the church, comes, thirdly, this respect for process, respect for the storehouse principle. That is, we try to bring something into existence that will minister to the most people. The one-on-one type of giving will still from time to time take place. Wherever we see a brother in need and we have the ability to help, we can. But there will be the development, administratively, of a mechanism to handle this so that in the body of Christ, we're ministering to the needs of the saints. Those needs include physical needs, emotional needs. They include spiritual needs, Every need that can be imagined, we're seeking to contribute to one another.

The last part of Romans 13:13 is in regard to hospitality—pursuing. Let me comment on that a moment, then we'll wrap up for today. "Contribute to the needs of the saints. Practice hospitality." In the Early Church, hospitality had two essential reasons for happening even beyond what we see today. There were traveling Christians, and there were persecuted Christians. In those days, they didn't have Howard Johnsons, or Holiday Inns, or even Motel 6s. And inns were notorious for filth, for crime, and the like. If a person were traveling or

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persecuted, the only safe place he could stay was a believer's open home. "Hospitality" literally means "a lover of strangers."

Paul says in regard to hospitality, practice it. The same word which in the Greek language is used for the word "persecute" is the same word Paul uses here for "practice." In fact, in verse 14 he'll say, "Bless those who persecute you," and the word there for "persecute" is the same in root form as it is in the verb here in verse 13. If we were to do some literalizing we'd say, "persecute hospitality." What the word simply means is pursue it, set in rapid motion, don't stand around passively. But go after one another. Take it upon yourself to really open your home and your heart to someone else.

Don't be worried about your home being an entertainment center. If you wait until your home is an entertainment center and everything is fixed up, and there's china in the china closet, or maybe a china closet at all, or the furniture is just right and everything, then you may never get around to being hospitable. It doesn't require entertainment to be hospitable. It requires an open heart. It's saying, "I'm not trying to impress you. I'm ready to share my life where it is right now. Come over." A room, an apartment, a home—anything can be used for this. So much happens in the Body when we're in one another's lives, when we're in one another's homes. So Paul is giving us admonition.

Kind of a devotional conclusion on this. Jesus says in John 13:34-35: "A new commandment I give to you: that you love one another. Even as I have loved you, you must love one another. By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." I heard a speaker recently read this text, then say, "What's new about the new commandment? Jesus said, 'A new commandment I give to you?' Isn't the heart of the old commandment, love God and love your neighbor? What then," he said, "is new about the new commandment?"

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I think here's what is new about the new commandment. It fits this whole perspective of what we've been talking about here. The first thing that's new about the new commandment is that Jesus brought us into a new relationship with the Father. And, therefore, because of a new relationship with the Father, we have a new relationship with one another. We are no longer strangers. We are brothers and sisters.

The second thing this new commandment does is that Jesus gave us a new standard. The old commandment was, "Love your neighbor as yourself." The new commandment: "Love as I have loved you." That's a whole different attitude than "love your neighbor as yourself." When we look at how Jesus modeled love, what He did was He set aside His safe place and take the risk to become involved in the needs of our lives and put himself in our world and took upon himself our very deepest needs. He showed, by becoming involved with us, that He cared. He didn't shout at us from the expanse of heaven down the earth, "I love you!" But He came among us. So there's a whole new standard by which we are to love. As we measure love for one another, we're to think not just, "How would I treat that person?" But, "How would the Lord treat that person?"

The third thing that is new about the new commandment is that Jesus says there's a new way now to relate truth to the world. "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples." Jesus has assured us that if the world looked at the Church having love, they would see and they would believe. Too often we as a Church have been going on special evangelistic outreaches. That is ordered of God. God sends evangelists to the Church. I'm not in any way demeaning that. But God intended for there to be, within His body, such a matrix, a camaraderie a spirit—of love that is so infectious and so vital and dynamic and so above and beyond anything that is going on in any worldly realm—that that in itself becomes a tremendous testimony to the truthfulness of the Christian faith.

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One person cannot do it all. If I were to spend an hour a month with each person in this sanctuary, that would mean about 150 hours a month, for one hour with each person. And you know, as a practical matter, that's impossible. So thank the Lord God He did not call me to be the sole minister of this church. I want to go one step beyond that so it's not misunderstood. I want this church to know that I want to be called when there is need, when there are problems or hurts and the like. That's part of being a pastor. Don't ever feel like you're taking my time, because you're not. But the point I'm trying to make is if the church is just one minister and a guy gets up front on Sunday morning and preaches, we're really in trouble. In more ways than one. But if God has called us to this kind of thing, communicating to the needs of the saints, what that means is that everybody who belongs to Jesus Christ belongs to one another, is a minister. And that Jesus is saying, get involved with one another.

How is the Lord speaking to you through this? Maybe He's saying to you as you look at your life, "You've got some ability to see, in the church, this thing come together." I'd like to see that happen. I'd like to see this church have a ministry that was people-oriented rather than buildings- or program-oriented. God would put some things in your mind—spirit of wisdom, spirit of understanding, the gift of faith to bring this about. I'm just wide open to whatever the Lord wants to happen.

I take this verse, Romans 12:13, just to stop and share my heart with you in kind of an informal way.