

ECCLESIOLOGY 101
How the Local Church Lives and Breathes
Part 9: The “Physiology” of Community

Tonight we’re in our 9th installment in a series that is taking a street level, organic look at what the Bible has to say about the way the local church lives and breathes.

Romans 12:9–21 Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. ¹⁰ Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. ¹¹ Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. ¹² Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. ¹³ Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. ¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. ¹⁷ Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. ¹⁸ If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹ 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.” ²⁰ 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.” ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

I’ve titled this installment: The Physiology of Community.

phys·i·ol·o·gy
fizē'äləjē

Noun

the branch of biology that deals with the normal functions of living organisms and their parts.

the way in which a living organism or bodily part functions.

The Holy Spirit wanted the community of believers in mid-1st century Rome to know how this thing called community is supposed to function — how it's supposed to work. So, He inspired Paul to write the things _____ just heard read to us, and then preserved so we would know how this thing called community is supposed to function in the 21st century.

Let's start with this — Earlier in this letter Paul

***Romans 1:17** For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."*

F.F. Bruce paraphrases this passage

"It is he who is righteous by faith that will live."¹

The outcome of right relationship with God is real life. We **receive** real life **by faith** in Jesus — and we **continue** in that real life **by faith!** Paul said that very thing of himself when writing his letter to the Galatians:

***Galatians 2:20** I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live **by faith** in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

He went on to tell them in **Galatians 5:6** how that faith functions — how it works.

F.F. Bruce — *faith, operates through love.²*

We *live by faith*, and that faith (that makes us alive to God) *operates through love* — *functions through love*.

¹ Bruce, F. F. (2017). *The Letters of Paul: An Expanded Paraphrase* (Ro 1:16–17). Nashville, TN; Bath, England: Kingsley Books.

² Bruce, F. F. (2017). *The Letters of Paul: An Expanded Paraphrase* (Ga 5:2–12). Nashville, TN; Bath, England: Kingsley Books.

THAT is the big underlying truth behind the way we function as individual members of the Body of Christ — members within a community of believing men and women.

Follow me here — Real “community” is a collection of men and women who have been made right **with** God and have received real life **from** God by faith in Jesus. Their faith in Jesus is the common union — the thing that unites them; hence the words of the Apostles Creed: *I believe in ... the communion of saints*;

THAT faith in Jesus is the binding reality of real community. And THAT FAITH *operates through love*

Romans 12:9-21 tells us how real community (men and women who share in that very real common union) is supposed to function. I find it interesting that it has nothing to do say about pragmatic function; about the operational systems of a local church. This is all about the way real faith functions through love in ways that are essential for the life and growth of community — essential for a community to build itself up — and essential for a community to reproduce; i.e. be faithful and fruitful in making disciples. When a local church fails to function in the way Paul describes it’s reduced to a lifeless machine — or more accurately, and truly ugly — a walking, talking, lifeless cadaver.

1. REAL FAITH *operates through sincere love*

Romans 12:9 Let love be genuine.

love = agapē

John Stott points out that up to this point in Paul’s letter to the community of believers in Rome every use of this particular Greek word for love has been in regards to the love of God; the love of God demonstrated on the cross (5:8), the love of God poured into our hearts (5:5) and the love of God refusing to let us go (8:35, 39).³ But now Paul shows us how the faith that brings us into right

³ Stott, J. R. W. (2001). *The message of Romans: God’s good news for the world* (p. 330). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

relationship with God — not only connects us to the very life of God. Now Paul drills down on how the love of God demonstrated in the cross of Jesus really has been poured into our hearts so that we can love others with it.

The *agapē* love of God is an essential function of faith in Jesus — which literally creates community.

The **NIV** really helps us see how emphatic the Holy Spirit is here

Romans 12:9 (NIV) Love must be sincere.

sincere - ‘without hypocrisy’. We get our English word hypocrisy/hypocrite from the Greek word hypokritēs. That was the word the Greeks used for actors playing a part on stage — pretending to be someone they weren’t.

In church culture men and women say “I love you” with great ease. Again, to quote the famous philosopher Inigo Montoya — *You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means.*

QUOTE: John Stott — *The church must not turn itself into a stage.*

People should never walk into a church — or look at a community of men and women (people whose faith in Jesus creates a powerful common union) and think: This is an act! I’ve seen these people outside of these walls! I’ve overheard them talking dirt about the people they say they love! (incident at Peets — I love ___ but — and for the next 40 minutes tore him to shreds!)

That SHOULD never be — that MUST NOT BE — because God’s love is sincere! He said: I love you — then He came and died for us!

QUOTE: John Stott — *The church must not turn itself into a stage. For love is not theatre; it belongs to the real world.*

God’s love belongs to our very real, very broken world! God’s love is for very broken people!

Real love and hypocrisy are actually mutually exclusive.

QUOTE: John Murray — *If love is the sum of virtue, and hypocrisy the epitome of vice, what a contradiction to bring these together!*

We should never forget that it's possible to **say** "I love you" when in reality those words are a pretense for a self-serving agenda. The ultimate proof of that is Judas who betrayed Jesus with a kiss.

Sincere love is an essential function of faith in Jesus — the faith that literally creates community (common union). Faith operating through sincere love is stunning!

1. REAL FAITH *operates through sincere love*

2. REAL FAITH *operates through devoted brotherly love*

This has been coming at us week after week! *Philadelphia* — Brotherly love. That sibling love that the adopted sons and daughter have for each other that involves transparency (siblings are fully know by each other, "a sibling knows what their sister looks like without make-up"). Sibling love involves shared space (letting people in, making space for them in your life, your thoughts). Sibling love involves shared resources (emotional, spiritual and material resources). That sibling love is an essential function of faith in Jesus that literally creates community (common union). Faith operating through brotherly love is stunning!

But check this out — Paul amplifies the meaning of sibling love by saying *love one another with brotherly love*

Love one another — the word love is **philostorgos**. It describes family love. It's from the word **storge** which is often translated **bondedness** or **affection**.

Again — the NIV is really helpful here

Romans 12:10 (NIV) Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.

People who are in love will often say: *We were made for each other!* **Storge** isn't that! **Storge** is the kind of love that unites people who are almost comically not made for each other! **Storge** exists between people who apart from the common union of faith in Jesus and by the adopting love of God would have had nothing to do with each other.

NEWS FLASH — God **gives** us those people in community! When faith is real it operates in such a way that we think: He or she can be difficult; or, they're not very together, not very hip — but my faith in Jesus has done a work in my heart where I know I'm connected to them.

The faith that creates real community functions — operates through **storge** which means that we will live and breathe in a way that is notably lacking in the insider/outside snobbishness toward people of different race, different income, different personalities, or style.

Devoted brotherly love is an essential function of the faith in Jesus that literally creates community (common union). Faith operating through devoted brotherly love is stunning and compelling! Those feeling hopelessly displaced — disconnected — alienated and alone see this devoted brotherly and they are going to want in — and that is our cue to tell them about Jesus!

1. REAL FAITH *operates through sincere love*
2. REAL FAITH *operates through devoted brotherly love*
3. REAL FAITH *operates through generous love*

¹³ **Contribute to the needs of the saints**

This has come at us from multiple directions in connection with nature of brotherly love — shared space and shared resources. But the way Paul frames it here is pretty radical.

Romans 12:13 (NLT) *When God's people are in need, be ready to help them.*

It's like you are taking forethought **in anticipation** of needs — so that **you'll be ready** when it comes.

Romans 12:13 (NKJV) distributing to the needs of the saints

Distributing **from** your possessions with those more needy than yourself.

¹³ seek to show hospitality.

seek = more than practice hospitality. It means to pursue it with intense effort. In other words — opening your home **to** others or **for** others is a costly effort. .

(Sharon moving in with us — Tim Dickenson moving in with us — Doug Blake moving in with us — Michael Bostwick moving in (the way he chewed with is mouth opened made me want to throw up in my mouth)

Generous love is an essential function of the faith in Jesus that literally creates community (common union).

1. REAL FAITH *operates through sincere love*
2. REAL FAITH *operates through devoted brotherly love*
3. REAL FAITH *operates through generous love*

Look at what Paul sandwiches between **devoted brotherly love** and **generous love**

¹¹ Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. ¹² Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.

4. REAL FAITH *operates through love that can leave us exhausted*

The kind of love faith operates by is far from easy — far from cheap — it can leave us exhausted.

1. REAL FAITH *operates through sincere love*
2. REAL FAITH *operates through devoted brotherly love*
3. REAL FAITH *operates through generous love*

4. REAL FAITH *operates through love that won't quit*

5. REAL FAITH *operates through love that blesses those who hurt us*

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.

This is so relevant in a culture of rage. 'Blessing' and 'cursing' are opposites wishing people respectively good or ill, health or harm. Paul

6. REAL FAITH *operates through love that really cares about others*

¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.

Faith operates through a love that refuses to stand disconnected or disengaged from other people's joys or pains. It identifies with them **sings** with them and **suffers** with them. It **enters deeply** into their experiences and their emotions, their laughter and their tears.

Can you — do you rejoice with others in their success? Are you excited about the fact they're making so much money — and becoming more popular? It can be hard to **rejoice** with your Christian brothers and sisters who are doing better than you are. Or how about the flip side of that brokenness — when we rejoice when someone's weeping? person weeping