

BROTHERLY LOVE

Romans 12:10

Dr. George O. Wood

Romans 12:10 is our Scripture for today: “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves” (NIV).

My growing up years were spent in small churches where people addressed one another as “Brother” and “Sister.” This custom was so deeply-fixed that the pastor, even, in public called his wife “Sister.” And if I were going by that form, I would call my wife, instead of Jewel, “Sister Wood.” Even closest friends might call one another brother or sister, rather than calling one another by their first name—especially if they were in ministry, pulpit ministry.

When a friend of mine was questioning his parents about a close couple that they had known for years, over three decades, he asked his mother, what was your friend’s first name? She had called her “Sister” for so many years, even after thirty years of close friendship, she did not know her first name.

Children were never allowed to call adults by first names. It was always “Brother” or “Sister,” with the last name. This custom of calling one another Brother and Sister was so deeply-ingrained that I had to reprogram myself when I went to school during the week.

Indeed, “Mr.” and “Mrs.” seemed so very cold in the church setting. In fact, I never remember calling another believer by the title Mr. or Mrs. until my first year in college. Then when I went to Evangel College in Springfield, Missouri, one of the things they told us to do was call the professors Mr. or Mrs. or Miss, and if they had their doctorate, call them Dr. I thought that was one mark of spiritual coldness in the school.

Getting the transfer straight from the church to the secular world was sometimes a problem. I remember, to my deep mortification and unspeakable embarrassment one day, forgetting that I

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was not in church, but instead in school and talking to my sixth-grade school teacher. Instead of calling her Mrs., I called her Sister. It's probably where I began to dislike the term.

Not any more, though. Maybe it would have been better to—instead of calling one another Sister and Brother and using the last name—simply use the first name. That would have, perhaps, made it more personal.

Today's text tells us how to love one another as brothers or as brothers and sisters. The New International Version puts verse 10 this way: "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves." This commandment, or admonition, in Romans 12:10 is the second step of Paul's counsel on the general theme which he began in verse 9 with, "Let love be genuine." And having arrived at that as a definition of love—let love be genuine or unfeigned, unpracticed, unhypocritical—he is going to give, in the succeeding verses, a series of behavior objectives, whereby we know specifically how it is that love is genuine. Step one was simply love what is good, or hold fast what is good, and hate what is evil.

As we look at this today, we'll share together the theme that we're to know that we are brothers. We are to feel toward one another as brothers. And we are to act toward one another as brothers. We are brothers.

Paul uses the term here on brotherly love. The word "philadelphia" is simply the combination of the two Greek words he uses here: "adelphus" for the word brother, and "phileo" for the word love, or friendship, or the like. So "Philadelphia." We are to have brotherly love. We are brothers.

You say, "Pastor, aren't you making a rather obvious point? We know this is theologically true. Once we're brought into the family of God, we're brothers." But sometimes what is obvious may not be so apparent in the everyday way we relate. That's why I'm going to spend some time this morning beating an obvious point to death.

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Women, in the congregation might say, “If it says ‘love one another with brotherly affection,’ where does that leave us?” I just want to assure you at the outset that the word “brother,” as it’s employed here, is what would be called a generic term. Like the word “man” sometimes embraces femaleness as well as maleness. So brotherhood embraces sisterhood as well as brotherhood.

A clear example of this is in Acts 1, where the 120 are gathered together after the ascension of the Lord, waiting for the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost. Luke tells us in verse 14 that these people were all of one accord, devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers—that is, His physical brothers. But notice that Mary and the women were in the group. What happens? Verse 15: “Peter stood up among the brethren...” Among who? Just the males? No, the brethren. The brothers and the sisters. And he said, “Brethren, the Scripture is to be fulfilled.” And again, he uses that term. So it is an embracing term.

Sometimes, when you ask a person who is not really familiar with the message of Scripture—the content of the New Testament—the real key to Jesus’ whole mission in life. If you ask them, “What is the key to what Jesus taught? What is the central theme the New Testament is talking about?” They might reply that Jesus came to teach us about the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. There’s a certain measure of truth to that. Jesus did teach us that God is our Father. And He also taught us that we are to relate as human beings. Whether we are in the faith together, we’re still to simply treat everyone with kindness, and even love of our enemies. (“He sends his rain upon the just and the unjust” [Matthew 5:45].) So we are, in like manner, to let our relationships with others not be reserved or prejudicial. But in a very specific way, when we come to that concept “brotherhood of man,” the New Testament uses the word “brother” in just three specific ways.

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The word “brother” is used to describe the relationship within a natural family—like, for example, Jesus’ brothers and sisters.

It can be used also, on occasion, to describe the relationship of persons within the Jewish faith.

For example, Stephen, in his martyrdom, addresses his accusers as “brethren.” And Paul would do the same thing later in the Book of Acts. In beginning of an address, he would say,

“Brethren...” Why would they do this? Because they shared a common identity, a common linkage, a common faith, a common affinity.

But the most frequent use of the word “brethren” in the New Testament is to describe the relationship that happens among the people who are related to God the Father through Jesus Christ, Savior and Lord. Of the some 250 approximate times the word “brother” or “brothers” or “brethren” is used in the New Testament, the vast majority of instances refer to the linkage among believers.

The first time Jesus established this identity is found in the Gospels. In Mark 3, his natural mother and natural brothers have come to rescue Him. They think, as the quaint expression goes, that He may be just a little bit “touched.” So they’ve come to sort of squire Him away.

“A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, ‘Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.’ ‘Who are my mother and my brothers?’ he asked. [He knew who they were naturally, but He wants to establish now a whole new truth.] Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother’ (Mark 3:32–35, NIV).

Having then established the kind of relationship within the family which Jesus is bringing, He later talks to His disciples in Matthew 23:8, when He’s telling them not to be like the other religions, where the people that are in the forefront grab the big titles. He says, “You have only one Master [Jesus] and you are all brothers.”

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In His famous story of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25—where He talks about how when He was hungry, we fed Him; when He was thirsty, we gave Him drink; when He was naked, we clothed him; when He was in prison, we came to him; and when He was sick, we visited Him—He uses this to indicate the kind of relationship that we're to have toward people who are in need. He very exclusively identifies who those kinds of things are to be practiced toward by saying to them—when they surprisingly find out that it was Him all the while that they've been doing all these things toward—He says to them, “In as much as you've done it to one of the least, my brethren.” Here, He's not so much talking about the Christian's relationship to the world at large—although when we see someone hungry, we should feed them and the like—but He knows that as the faith develops, there's going to be great pressure and persecution against the faith. And there are going to be disciples that are picked off and isolated and herded and hunted. He's saying, “Don't let that believer stand alone. Come to them when they're hungry. Feed them. You've done it to one of the least of these, my brethren.”

When He rises again from the dead, He tells the women, who are panic-stricken as they leave the tomb, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brethren [again, not His physical brothers, but His disciples] to go to Galilee” (Matthew 28:10).

And Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15:6: “Then He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time.” Once the linkage of brethren is made, it goes on and on and is repeated through the epistles and Acts.

You say, “Ok, pastor. But you haven't said anything new so far. We accept the definition that if we've been born into the kingdom of God, we have been born into a kingdom where there are brothers. We are a family together. Now what's the application that you're making?” I'd like to make three very simple applications of this theme that we are brothers to one another.

First of all, if we are brothers, one obvious conclusion is true.

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I. Neither of us is an only child.

When we're born into the Kingdom, we're not the only ones who have been born into that Kingdom. I've found that coming into the family as the last child, being the youngest is indeed an interesting position. I didn't like it when I was in it, but now, as families go, it's kind of enjoyable because they've got more years on them than me, and I've got more years to go. It doesn't seem like I've missed anything at all.

But as the youngest child born into a family of what turned out to be three children, I had no choice as to who I wanted as brother and sister. I got what was there. My sister is eight years older than I, and my brother is five years older than I. When I was due to come into the world, my sister ardently wanted a little baby sister to be born and was deeply disappointed that "a man-child has come into the world." She was so grief-stricken by this that the doctor, in seeking to cheer her up said, "We have a little baby down the hall that is a girl, and we'll be happy to trade if you'll just switch the beds." She then realized that, even though she hadn't seen me yet (it's striking what an affinity is already created in a family) she decided, no, she'd rather have me. That's how I got into the family.

We're not an only child. When we come into the family of God, we find other people have been there before us. In fact, this is one of the things, I think, that is so interesting when you study Church history or when you sing a hymn from the past, like when you sing a hymn of Martin Luther. I'm not only singing some distant words or studying about somebody from back then. These are really my brothers and sisters whose words I'm singing, whose stories are being retold through me. And someday, we're going to have a reunion when I get to really know them. They've been in the family before me. I don't get to pick and choose my family. The family is there when I arrive. It's for me to adjust and relate to the family that is there.

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This is one reason why I have such a dislike for something called the homogeneous church growth principle, which basically says, “Birds of a feather flock together.” And, “Look and relate to the people that think like you, act like you, and look like you,” and the like. I realize there is some sociological validity, and we do tend to group together. But there’s still something about that that troubles me because the kingdom of God is not made up of just everybody who is alike. I’ve never found that my natural brother and sister were like me. But I was in that family, and I’m not an only child. So in the kingdom of God, you find that other people have been here before you and many of them are different, but it’s a great family.

II. The second thing that comes out of the truth that we are brothers is that when we are really brothers, it means that we’re more than an acquaintance, or more than friends.

The tie goes deeper than that.

I was thinking, in preparation for this message, of the time that we brought Georgie home from the hospital when he’d been born. The cheapest house we’d ever lived in, that was also our biggest house, was a great big, old, two-story, nine-room house in Springfield, Missouri on Lynn Street that we bought for \$9,500. It was mammoth. It had one of these beautiful, big porches on it with steps coming down. The day we brought Georgie home from the hospital, we brought Evangeline out the front door, down the steps, the movie camera going, recording that moment when she sees baby brother coming for the first time. That is a precious moment. You parents know what I’m talking about. This little girl was presented with her brother, and from now on, for life, he would be to her George Paul and she would be to him Evangeline.

If something had happened to little George Paul or little Evangeline at an early age, they would never have had the chance to grow deeper into one another and would only have known one another as a name, an acquaintance, someone who in the very distant past, in the murky gray-black zone of childhood, you know you had a recollection of something happening, but it ceased.

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It didn't come into being. But because they had a chance to be together and relate together over the years, they've come to know one another. And though they don't realize it, they are very close to one another.

I want to do something for a moment, try an experiment. Look around for a moment and see if you're sitting near anyone whom you do not know. Take a moment and introduce yourself.

There are quite a few of you next to one another who hadn't met one another before. Now, you've just had the Georgie-Evangeline experience. You have met one another for the first time.

It can go beyond that. One of the ways it might go beyond that is to recognize you have extra stew on at home and you're going to take that acquaintance for lunch and begin, already, deepening that. Or inviting them out, or establishing some other linkage, either today or down the road. You can do with that acquaintance what you will. But brothers and sisters go beyond that first interface meeting and start carrying it into relationship with one another. It's possible within a body of believers, always within this body of believers, to meet people for the first time. One of the confusing things about this church is that there's such a stream of people that we have a rich opportunity to meet one another for the first time.

The danger that can develop is that, after we're together in the same body for a year's time, if we know everyone the same way we knew everyone at day one when we came in, that's when something is goofed up in our relationship with the family, or within the family itself. The Lord wants us to take those first, initial encounters and take them deeper, like a normal brother-sister relationship would.

It would be easy for me to here start laying a guilt trip on people. I'm not going to do that. My mother never got me to love my brother, Paul, by saying, "Georgie, you are going to love Paul!" She had a very simple, wise way—probably didn't even realize what she was doing. She just put us in the same room. And my brother and I love each other very much.

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First John 3:14 gives us a very simple test on the assurance of salvation. Sometimes we may get a little bit too mystical about this assurance of salvation. First John 3:14 is almost off the wall in terms of it not coming from the direction we expect. But John says, “We know that we have passed out of death into life...” How do we know? Because we feel good? Because we feel forgiven? That may be part of it, but not according to John’s statement here. “We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death.” The way of knowing and having that assurance that you’re in the family of God is, not only is your love going vertically, but your love is going out, and you’re receiving and giving love. Love for the brethren.

So we are brothers. We’re not an only child. A brother is certainly more than an acquaintance or friend.

III. A third thing is relationship in family lasts as long as life.

I will have a natural relationship with my brother and sister as long as they live. When one of them dies, then the relationship is broken. The thing about the family of God is that it is a forever family. The natural relationship can afford to be a part of that forever family. All of my family believes in Jesus, so we have a forever existence even within family. But the only way to have a forever family is what Jesus told us. By first of all, becoming children of God. The natural family may be divided and may not have an opportunity to continue to respond to Jesus Christ. A failure, therefore, to be a forever family. But God puts us in forever relationships.

Jesus says in Mark 10: “Surely, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or land for my sake and for the gospel who will not receive a hundredfold now, in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come, eternal life.”

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The thing He puts last is eternal life. We're waiting for eternal life to put the foreverness to the family. You have a whole lot of things that are happening right now for being in the kingdom of God. Unexpected blessings you may not have realized. A hundredfold increase in relatives.

All of us have only had one natural mother. But the Lord tells us, when we come into His family, what do we have? An increase of mothers. Same way, you've only had one natural father. Also houses, homes. How many homes belong to you because you're in the Christian family? Every house in the congregation. Our homes ought to be open enough that if somebody needs a house, they can land in ours. The Lord says when we come into His kingdom, we have a hundredfold. That's a one-hundred-percent increase. So if you've had ten brothers and sisters, there ought to be at least a thousand brothers and sisters that are yours in the kingdom of God. Look around for the increase.

We realize that when we look at family, we have all of this and eternal life, too. God has placed in our Body a tremendous potential for rich, rewarding, interpersonal relationships. This is part of being in the kingdom of God. The Church is meant to be not a collection of friends or acquaintances, but the family of God. We want to tap into that potentiality. That's why we're going to take the time we're going to take in Romans 12.

We're brothers or sisters, but Paul is telling us that we are to feel toward one another as brothers. He says in Romans 12 that we are to love one another with brotherly affection. That idea of brotherly affection carries with it the idea of feeling. I believe it's the King James that puts it this way: "kindly affection." That word "kindly" is an interesting word. I was amazed to see how it got into our usage. It comes from the word "kin." When you say you have kin, you've got relatives. And when you wanted to describe treating someone outside family like you treat someone in the family, you say you "kinned" him. And people got tired of using the word "kinned," so they just shortened it to "kind." They were kind, or they were kindly. So we're to be

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kindredly-affectioned one toward another. One old Scottish pastor used to say, “Remember, if you’re not very kind, you’re not very spiritual.” There’s a lot of merit in that.

My brother and I, in growing up, could wrestle and fight. But someone else had better not pick a fight with me in my brother’s presence. It was ok for us to get into a tussle, but nobody else from the outside. I sometimes think God is like this.

I remember once in Springfield, Missouri. There are two strong groups there, Assemblies of God and fundamental Baptists. They are both in the kingdom of God. They don’t know it yet, but they’re both there. Doctrinally, especially on the Holy Spirit, they’re just at one another. But I remember once an agnostic, skeptic newspaper columnist in Springfield really took out after the Baptists. I just sat down and wrote him a strong letter. Why did I do that? I realize now that we can wrestle among ourselves, but don’t you dare come in from outside the family and tell us what to do.

I do not recommend fights among believers. But there is this kind of family sense, is the point I’m trying to make. The Greeks had a word for the family sense, the natural love. It’s a word that Paul uses here. Paul has a definite play on words. If you were translating Romans 12:10 literally, what it works out is something like this: “Brother love toward one another, family love.” In other words, in your love for one another as brothers, have the kind of love that is present in natural family relationships.

To give you an idea of the force of this word, this idea of natural love, I traced down a reference in the intertestamental literature in 2 Maccabees 6:18–20, which was written during the time that Antiochus Epiphanes had invaded Jerusalem and offered a pig on the altar. About 167 to 166 B.C., the story in 2 Maccabees 6 described Eleazer, who was a godly man. “Eleazer, one of the scribes in high position, a man now advanced in age and a noble person, was being forced to open his mouth and eat swine flesh. But he, welcoming death with honor, rather than life with

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pollution, went up to the rack of his own accord, spitting out the flesh as men ought to go who have the courage to refuse things that is not right to taste, even for the natural love of life.” That word “natural love” is the same word. It can be described as natural love for life, it’s so deep an emotion. You try to take my life from me and unless you have a good cause you’re going to have a fight. Even at that point, you’re going to get into trouble if you try to take life. I have an innate, instinctive love of life. But this word was also used to describe an instinctive love within family. Paul would say of the Roman world, in Romans 1:31, that one of the curses of the modern world was here were people without natural affection. For example, every night in the Roman arena, the Roman Forum, there would be thirty to forty abandoned children. Because it was practiced in many aspects of society that when a baby was born, it was presented at its father’s feet. If the father lifted up the child, he received it. If he didn’t lift up the child, turned his back and went away, the child was abandoned. It is unnatural. This is without family love. We think of abortion in the modern context as the best example we could get of this kind of thing in our society.

Without natural, kindred, kind of love and affection.

It is this very word, which describes love of life, which is so deep and innate—and love in family, which is so deep and innate—that Paul drives home to say, “This is the kind of love that believers are to have toward one another.” Not a put-on love, not a sham love, not a hypocritical love, but a love that is deeply-fixed and rooted in the consciousness of family love. Affection love.

This doesn’t mean that you have to be like each other to have this love. My brother is as unlike me as the day is long. Totally different interests in life than me. We have been unlike each other since the day we were born. Yet we have family love.

This kind of love between us means that as we come to a consciousness of who we are—that we’re brothers, and we would never do anything toward one another that would physically or

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emotionally harm one another, that we're for one another. If either of us ever got in trouble, the other would be there, even though now we're separated by the miles. God wants us within the Christian family Body to experience and express brotherly love—this kind of natural love. Sometimes we have problems doing this. Some of it may arise out of our family setting from which we came. You may come out of what you would identify as a very poor family structure, where not a lot of love was expressed and where you may have felt abandoned or rejected. That's one of the beautiful things about the family of God is that it should replace and displace all the bad experiences that grow up in natural families. If you haven't had a good father in a human context, let me give you good news. You've got a good Father now. God the Father is not the earthly father. God, the Father in Scriptures, is called "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." I believe Jesus had a good dad, putting it in the vernacular. That is our father. We are now related to one another as brothers and sisters. So we shove away from those bad family background situations into a newness of life. Christ has made all things new.

I realize that this just doesn't happen overnight. It happens through a process of deciding, in the will, that this is the way I'm going to relate to my brothers and sisters. I'm going to experience Christian family and then begin to practice it. Sometimes—perhaps, especially, in our modern setting, where we've got an opportunity for self-advancement—we may tend to be a little bit too selfish with ourselves so that the relationships that God wants us to build among each other suffer neglect because we're so pursuing our own interests.

I happen to be the kind of person that believes that feelings often follow actions. When we talk about love for the brethren, we're not talking about a fluttering in the heart that we mystically, all of a sudden, emotionally relate. In fact, that's how we do it in romantic love. Our divorce rates have proved that that's not working. I'm not sure that romantic love is the answer. It was for me, but it may not be for everybody.

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But often—and this is a key insight to biblical love—actions often precede the feelings. When we begin behaving and relating like the Lord taught us, if we're natural people renewed by the grace of God, the feelings of compassion and empathy and rejoicing and weeping would be there. So Paul is telling us, "Feel toward one another as brothers." A very simple admonition.

Another thing he is saying:

IV. We're to act toward one another as brothers.

The Revised version says, "Outdo one another in showing honor" (Romans 12:10). Some would say, "I've got to honor them the most because I want to be distinguished for honoring them the most, so I can have the honor for having honored them the most." I have some problems with that. That seems competitive. I don't like that translation. It's not necessarily faithful to the concept Paul's getting at. The New International Version puts it this way, and I think better:

"Honor one another above yourselves." That squares with the Lord's teaching, doesn't it?

When the disciples in the Upper Room are arguing about prestige and privilege and position and they won't wash one another's feet, the Lord washes their feet. Then He tells them, "For I have given you an example that you also should do as I have done to you" (John 13:15). Peter writes in 1 Peter 5:5 (he was in that room where the Lord washed the feet, and he remembers it in this verse): "Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility one toward the other."

Paul says in Philippians 2:3: "Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others as better than yourselves." Then he goes on to give that fantastic exposition. "You know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and what his example was—how, though he was in the form of God, he came in the form of a slave and became obedient unto death."

It's been estimated that over half (my own personal observation as a youth growing up in the church, 90 percent!) of the trouble that occurs in churches occurs over the issue of people's individual rights and their privileges and their prestige. (Thank God it has not been a part of this

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body.) Someone in the congregation has not been given his or her rightful place. Or someone has been neglected. Or someone has been unthanked. Someone has not been given a more prominent place that they thought they deserved, so feelings are hurt.

That's why this admonition comes in: "Honor others above yourselves." It's one way to diffuse almost all the friction that will ever occur in the Christian family. Ninety percent of it can be wiped out in with this one verse. Honor one another above yourselves.

I got to thinking. This is the seventh anniversary of my coming as pastor. There were three significant festivals in the Old Testament—Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles—where every year the people remembered what happened.

This week has always been that to me. I remember how God specifically gave us direction to come. I think back on that occasion, and I create a hypothetical situation. Suppose my natural brother, my brother Paul, had been in the ministry. And that while this church seven years ago was considering its choice for a pastor, that he and I were the two people that were being considered for the pastor of this church. And that he had been chosen as pastor rather than me.

How would I feel? I would suggest that that would make a great deal of difference as opposed to an "outsider" being selected, someone that I didn't know. Would I feel badly that my brother had been selected as pastor of this church rather than I? I don't think I would have. I would have said, "At least one of the family got it." I'd feel good about that. It stayed in the family. I wouldn't feel bad. I would not say I lost. I would say instead, because of natural brother love, "My brother won. My brother was chosen."

When all of a sudden I put that into all of the context of being in the family, where someone is chosen to do something when I thought I should have been chosen or I thought I was more qualified. I'm sure you've been in situations like this. Instead of kind of saying, "Did somebody get out of the will of God, or did the Lord make a mistake?" this verse tells us how we're to

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handle it. We're to say, "My brother got the responsibility! My brother got the promotion!"

We're to feel that way toward each other.

When you read Acts 1, it's an exciting story of the church's meeting. Judas has fallen from his apostleship. Now they need to put somebody in his place. So they have a nominating committee.

They gather together all of the information, and they finally narrow it down to two people whose qualifications cancel each other out. They did the perfectly biblical thing when they couldn't

make a decision on the basis of reason—they cast lots. Proverbs 16:33 says: "The lot is cast into the lap, but the decision is wholly from the Lord." A guy by the name of Joseph Barsabbas

Justus, his name occurs once in Scripture. He was not the chosen person, but Matthias was.

I used to read that and think, "I wonder how poor Joseph felt. 'I wasn't chosen. Lucky Matthias gets to be one of the twelve, be one of the foundation stones of Revelation.'" Maybe he enjoyed

some of the controversy over church theology when some thought that the Apostle Paul should be the twelfth and not Matthias. Do you think Joseph felt that way? Not at all. "My brother was

selected." That's what Paul was saying. In preferring one another above yourselves.

We have looked at this theme of brother love and said we are brothers. We are to feel toward one another as brothers, a family kind of feeling. And we're to act toward one another as brothers by

honoring one another as brothers above ourselves.

Let me ask a question. If life were a classroom and "Brother Love" were the one subject on the curriculum and you were the student, what grade would you be getting in the course? Is it the

grade that you really want? You may wince and say, "I'm getting a D-minus or F-plus." If that's your reaction, that's the stimulus of the Holy Spirit to say to you, "Get going! Start linking up!

Start establishing relationships."

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Don't wait from an official announcement from the pulpit or the pastoral staff that the church is beginning some new program. This is a do-it-yourself Book. I realize there's certain error in that. We do things together. But don't be afraid to express initiative in this matter.

You may say when you heard that question, "I'm not a 100 percent, but I think I'm an A-minus." My task is not to talk you out of that grade. Praise the Lord that you're an A-minus. I think of a person who said, "I've honestly searched my heart and everything was clean, everything was right," I think that's beautiful. I think it's beautiful when we can respond openly to the Lord and say, "Lord, I've been wrong." And we can, in honesty, look at our lives and say, "I'm doing all right." The purpose of the Holy Spirit is, in some cases, to comfort and, in some cases, afflict. He will do both works in one congregation simultaneously.

So Paul is saying, "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourself."