

BIBLE BACKGROUND  
Romans 12:9-13

**Let love be sincere. Hate evil; cling to what is good. With brotherly and sisterly love, tenderly love one another, putting others before yourselves, treating them with honour, doing this eagerly and not lagging behind. With a spirit on fire, serve the Lord, rejoicing in hope, persevering in trials, being committed to prayer, sharing in the needs of the saints, showing hospitality to strangers.**

In this paranetic section, Paul urges believers to literally, **love without hypocrisy** (2Cor 6:6). Love is to come from within, be genuine, not just charm or words. **Hate**, from a rare word αποτυγουντες, evil is self-explanatory. The opposite, to **cling to what is good**, from a verb that means to stay close together. Before Christians are ethical choices based on the goodness of God found in Christ. His life informs Christian behaviour.

Love is the chief characteristic of interactions between members within a church. Paul mentions it again: **With brotherly and sisterly love, tenderly love one another.** Christ has created a new relationship between people, namely, being a family, incorporated by baptism into his one body. Not only do Christians have his personality through the Spirit but they have a kinship and are related to each other. So, love is **brotherly**, and we must add sisterly. Φιλόστοργοι means to love dearly or tenderly. Christ brings a new sensitivity to Christians towards each other, so there is a sense of what they feel and concern for them. Paul amplifies what he is talking about by adding that instead of being above others, believers are to **treat them with honour, doing this with eagerly and not lagging behind.** Jesus spoke about the importance of the least, the lowest, poorest and youngest, considering that though they are last, they are to be treated as the first.

**With a spirit on fire, serve the Lord.** This fine expression comes from the verb ζέοντες, literally to boil or seeth, as is a boiling pot (Col 3:23f). This is the consequence of being saved by grace, through faith in Christ and all that he has done for the world. It comes out of being loved by God in Christ, of the force of God's gifts of forgiveness, of the Spirit being granted so that he dwells within, of being granted eternal life and all the darkness, the hopelessness and loneliness being remove. Service here is not directed back to oneself but rather, is to offer up all activity, especially activity within the church, to the Lord. This cannot be done without a sense of Christ's presence in one's life.

Joy is a hall-mark of meeting the Lord and one's life being changed but also with a certain promise of the resurrection and the defeat of suffering and death (Col 3:24). Thus, Paul says serving the Lord is carried out **rejoicing in hope.** In addition, Christians continue to serve the Lord Jesus while **persevering in trials and being committed to prayer.** Strength comes from the Lord (Phil 4:13), which gives patience and endurance and a desire to seek his help in prayer. Christ builds his church and the Spirit adds to it, which can only mean that congregations must serve with fire, hope, joy, patience and strength when they keep pleading for the Father's intervention through prayer. Not just prayer but **a persistent** προσκατερυντες activity of **prayer.**