

Faith and Familiarity
Romans 12:9-21

First Corinthians 13 says a lot about what love is not. Romans 12 tells us what love is, or should be, and Paul uses a word to suggest that we should love each other in church like **family**.

The Greek word is **STORGE**, the **natural affection** between family members. It is instinctive love, like a mother's love for her baby or a child's trust in his father, the most basic love there is between people – undemanding and unpretentious. It does not have to be won or earned, courted or attracted. We love each other even if we are not beautiful, perfect or popular.

We **grow** on each other. **STORGE** loves **familiarity**: Old friends, old neighbors, old co-workers or classmates, people who have always been there, even if we have little in common. It is the least discriminating of all loves. C. S. Lewis writes: *In my experience it is Affection that creates this taste, teaching us first to notice, then to endure, then to smile at, then to enjoy, and finally to appreciate, the people who "happen to be there."* We **grow** on each other, like family.

We can also **outgrow** each other. Lewis says affection is all about comfort and ease, like an old pair of jeans that fit just right. But wear them too much and they start to stink, or they wear out. Sometimes the better we know people, the more we take them for granted; the people who are always there do not always get the **courtesy** or **respect** we give to others. **Change** can affect affection too ... like when siblings go their own ways; when a best friend starts hanging out with someone else; when a family member marries someone different – politics, religion, race. The people of Nazareth turned against Jesus when He taught them with divine authority, not as the carpenter down the street. Even instinctive affection, familiarity, needs a little **grace**.

It is the essence of Christian fellowship: *Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.* **Sincere** probably comes from the Latin words for WITHOUT WAX, referring to the ancient custom of using wax to hide flaws in pottery. To be sincere is to be trustworthy, true, without deception or hypocrisy (like Judas Iscariot's kiss when he betrayed Jesus Christ at Gethsemane). Just the opposite ... sincere affection requires benevolence, compassion, tangible acts of **kindness** or **devotion** to another's well-being.

The words **kin** and **kind** are related, so Paul writes: *Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.* **STORGE**, family affection, means we can count on each other. Isaiah 58:7 says true devotion to God is devotion to each other: *"Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter – when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?"* **Generosity** is the **joy** of a loving God and His loving family! Isaiah 58:11 says we are **to each other** like a well-watered garden, a spring whose waters never fail (to the needy especially), because we are family.

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. **Affection** is **familiarity** or **togetherness** that **accepts** and **tolerates** one another in spite of our differences. It satisfies our fundamental human need to belong, to be accepted, and there is no better place to belong than Lower Providence Presbyterian Church! *Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.* It does not matter who we are or where we come from, what we have or how we look ... we are family, people who are **always there** and **always here** for each other in Jesus Christ.

STORGE is family affection that comes naturally to us, but it is **not automatic**. It takes **faith** in Jesus Christ who binds us together as God's chosen people, and **familiarity** so that we know, accept, care for and minister to each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. *Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.* Affection begins with association, fellowship, spending time together, being here with and for each other. First we notice, then we endure, then we smile at, then we enjoy, and finally we appreciate *the people who "happen to be there."*

When my sister Ellen, a Presbyterian missionary in Russia, came through Philadelphia last week on her way to a conference in Phoenix, our two brothers and two nieces made special trips so that we had a little family reunion in our house last week. It takes **work** to be a family. My guess is there are people in this room who do not know each other. I am embarrassed to say that I do not know all the members of Lower Providence Presbyterian Church yet. We need to get together whenever we can – not just in worship but also in small groups, Sunday School classes, circle meetings, youth fellowships, ministry activities, governing bodies – to recognize and support each other, pray for our friends by name, and work together for the glory of God.

The more the merrier! STORGE, family affection, thrives on a crowd. *As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another (Proverbs 27:17).* We rub off on each other, build each other up just by coming together every week. *Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.* Do not let anything or anyone keep us from our Christian family at Lower Providence Presbyterian Church!

We have a saying that blood is thicker than water, meaning true families stick together. Like a true family, you and I are bound inseparably to each other by the blood of Jesus Christ.