

**Title: The Real Thing****[Slide 1]****Text: Romans 12:9-10****Masks, anyone?****Thespis:**

This coming March will mark the 90<sup>th</sup> time that Hollywood gathers to hand out the coveted Oscars. The limos will pull up to the Dolby Theater. The stars will walk the red carpet before their adoring fans. And a few hours later a few of them will go home with that golden statue: the Oscar.

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The Oscars may be 90 years old, but the tradition of awarding a prize to the best actor goes back over 2500 years. The first Best Actor award went to a Greek actor named Thespis (from which we get the term *thespian*). He won the competition in Athens way back in 534 B.C.

Thespis is credited with not only winning Best Actor, but with creating a whole new style of acting in which one person performed the parts of various characters. To do so, he wore different masks – one for each part he was playing.

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Thespis' new approach to acting caught on quickly and spread throughout the ancient world. Actors wore elaborate masks, complete with hair, to represent heroes and villains, gods and goddesses. It is even thought that the shape of the mouth of the mask helped amplify their voices.

The Greeks had a special word for these mask-wearing actors: *hypocrite*.

**Not hypocritical:**

The word 'hypocrite' soon took on a more sinister meaning; it came to describe someone who pretends to be one kind of person while actually being quite different. It's a word that Jesus used with great force to describe

the self-righteous religious experts of His time: they professed moral purity but were actually guilty of the very things they accused others of doing. They were phoney. They were hiding their true selves behind a mask of religious piety and virtue. They were acting a part.

In writing to the Christians in Rome, Paul warns against such play-acting:

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*Romans 12:9a NIV*

*Love must be sincere.*

The word translated 'sincere' is actually "*not hypocritical*." Our love toward others is not an act. It is not something that we pretend to be doing, while our real motives are quite the opposite. Paul says: "Don't put on the Love Mask and pretend to love your neighbor! Take off the mask and love your neighbor with a sincere and pure heart. Love must be sincere."

#### **Masks, anyone?**

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The truth is that we all have a closet full of masks, whether we want to admit it or not. Wearing masks is part of everyday life. In a world where everyone is wearing a mask, it is dangerous to be the only person without one!

So what would it look like to do a day *without the mask*? What would it look like to take off the masks of our own making and allow the face of Jesus to shine into our world? What would it be like to stop play-acting and to start actually living out what it means to be renewed in the image of our Creator?

#### **Love Never Fails**

##### **100% Pure:**

If love is to be genuine, it must be completely pure.

The essence of hypocrisy is that we mingle the good with the bad. The mask smiles, while the mind is stewing on past hurts. We offer our love to a friend

or spouse, but it is laced with selfish expectations. We justify jealousy or a controlling spirit by saying it's just that we love you so much.

Paul says that there is no place for anything that adulterates or contaminates God's love shining through us. It has to be 100% pure. No exceptions. No masks. No hypocrisy.

That is why Paul writes:

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*Romans 12:9b NIV*

*Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.*

We make a fateful choice when we wear a mask: however noble our motives or pure our theology, the mask makes room for wiggle room in our hearts. It allows us to give less than 100% to another person. We can retain our true self, hidden by the mask's smile. We can cling to hurt, anger, unforgiveness, prejudice, pride. We can cling to "what is evil," while masquerading as a loving, caring friend.

It is only when we dare to take off the mask that God's pure love can shine both into us and out into our relationships.

**Love never fails:**

This is the love that comes directly from God Himself as He lives His New Creation Life in us.

What does 100% pure love look like?

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*1 Corinthians 13:4-8a NIV*

*Love is patient, love is kind.*

*It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.*

*It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.*

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*Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.*

*It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.*

*Love never fails.*

**The Real Thing****Unveiled faces:**

So how do we discover this 100% love? How do we cling to what is good so powerfully that this love shines out of us in even the most challenging relationships?

Paul says that the secret to discovering this is to take off the ultimate mask: the one that we wear for God! He writes to the same church in Corinth:

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*2 Corinthians 3:18 NIV*

*And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate/reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*

You see, this 100% love does not come from within us. It is not something that we can conjure up or teach ourselves. It comes from God Himself.

**In His image:**

When I was a kid, my dad taught me how to make prints from film negatives. The process started with going into the darkroom. The room had to be completely light-proof, no contaminating outside light that would spoil the picture I was going to print.

To make the print, I exposed a sheet of photographic paper to a projected image of the film. Then, almost like magic, I watched as the image slowly emerged on the paper.

To get a perfect print, nothing could get in the way of the image being projected on the paper. Anything that masked the projected image would mar the print.

The same is true for you and me. We are God's photographic paper. He projects His love on us. His Spirit does the mysterious work of causing the picture of His love to take shape in our lives. And when that happens, we find that we "are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." (2 Corinthians 3:18 NIV)

### **The real thing!**

To be "A Place for you" means being a community of people who allow themselves to be transformed by the God who made them and loves them. It means to drop our masks and let God's love shine into our hearts. It means to keep the masks off so that His love can shine into the lives of others.

It means:

#### **[Slide 10]**

*Romans 12:10 NIV*

*Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.*

Things as mundane as carpet and seats become a way of showing that we care and honor those who come into our church. A sound system that allows each person to hear and experience music and the word clearly, is likewise a way of honoring one another.

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But this will only happen if first of all we choose to drop our masks, hate what is evil, and cling to what is good.

When we do that, the world will catch a glimpse of what it needs most: God's matchless love.