

Life in the Local Church, Part 4

Selected Scriptures

The one another commands: what they do in the New Testament as you start to look at all these commands, they really are bringing the body together. They're really pushing all of us into contact with one another, forcing us together, if you will and they are useful, those commands are useful, to the Lord by the Spirit in forging us into a healthy, vital, growing church: Harmonious and considerate, loving, united. As Paul told the Philippians, we're to be "of the same mind," we're to have "the same love," we're to "be in full accord and of one mind." That's, that's how we live consistently with the Gospel of Jesus Christ that we've come to believe. Philippians 1:27, Paul says, "Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you, that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind, striving side by side," there it is, that proximity issue, "side by side for the faith of the gospel." For the faith of the gospel.

Now, all of that, those one another's, they start on the inside, not on the outside. They start with the attitude in the heart and in the mind, and then they come out. When God saves somebody, he transforms that person from the inside out. The Spirit regenerates, he causes someone to be born again to new spiritual life, and that's as deep as you can go on the inside, totally regenerating the life, totally giving brand new spiritual life. That's as deep as you can go. God justifies, declaring that person to be in a right relationship with himself through Jesus Christ and then the Spirit continues the work that has begun by sanctifying. He takes that internal transformation, that internal change, and brings it to the outside, so that everybody can see it. He makes the positional reality a practical reality.

And all that starts with the triad of virtues that we learn to grow in, we learn to embrace, that drive the entirety of the Christians life, a triad of virtues or attitudes in the local church. We've talked about them several times: love, humility, and the pursuit of unity. Love, humility, and the pursuit of unity. And all of that starts with the most foundational of them all, love, right? Love. Jesus said, John 13:35, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." Love is the badge that marks us out as Christians.

Love is the badge; it's the, the card that we carry that says, yes, I am truly a Christian, because that kind of *agape* love, that sacrificial giving to others for the, wholly for the sake of that person, wholly for the sake of their good, wholly for the sake of their growth, wholly for the sake of their purity, their sanctification, their holiness, that kind of love that has nothing to do with self-interest. That's not generated by man. That doesn't come from us; it comes from God. God was the first, God was the only Person to introduce that love to the world. And he provided us with a clear, profound example, most significant example of *agapé* love, what is that? His son, right? He sacrificed his beloved son on the cross for the sins of an indifferent people, to tell you the truth. The sins of a people who didn't acknowledge him, the sins of a people who were even rebellious enemies before God introduced himself to them.

So that what's love is, right? Sacrificial giving, wholly and completely for our good. God did it first. We follow suit. God dealt with our true need as he defined it when he punished Christ for our sins. That's our deepest need is to be forgiven of our sins, to have righteousness from God, that's our deepest need. Only God has shown that kind of love, and it's only God who gives that kind of love to his people. Romans 5:5, "The love of God" and that's the word *agapé* again, the *agapé* of God, "has

been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who's been given to us." That's the only way that you have that kind of love. That's the only way you can show that kind of love, is if you're a Christian. And it's as if the Holy Spirit has been poured into your heart; he's poured that kind of love into your heart and out of you comes that kind of love. That's how God loves the world is through you as well.

That's why John wrote in his epistle, 1 John 4:7, "Love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God." That's regeneration. "Whoever loves has been born of God and knows God." That's justification, bringing you into a right relationship with him through declaring you righteous and it leads to sanctification, continually knowing God.

Well, we also saw last time how that love, which is to be at the heart, the foundation, the most profound level the heart of all we do, how that love translates into an attitude of humility toward one another. Of humility. We're to "do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit," Philippians 2:3, "nothing from selfish ambition or conceit but in humility," we're, "to count others as more important," more significant, "than ourselves." Right? Armed with an attitude of humility and gentleness and patience, we're to "bear with one another in

love.” We’re to be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” These attitudes, so important, so vital to our life here because love and humility, they enable us to do what God has called us to do, which is to strive, Philippians 2:2, “to be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.” You only do that if you’re saturated with the love of God, and the love of God is compelling you and driving you. You only do that if you’re humble, if you’re humble before God and man.

Okay, now go to 1 Corinthians 14. Look at 1 Corinthians 14 in verse 23. I want you to see the effects, just one of the effects, here, of this one another behavior, reinforcing the truth with one another here in the life of the local church. Look at 1 Corinthians 14:23, “If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your minds?” Can you imagine that? This isn’t ongoing today, people knowing languages they’ve never studied before, being able to speak in those things, those languages. But it is was going on in Corinth, was going on in the early church in the apostolic era. And some uninitiated believer walks into the First Church of Corinth, find out what’s going on here with all these Christians, with all these Jesus people, this Jesus disciples

and he comes in and finds everyone speaking in all kinds of languages he cannot understand. What is this? Total chaos. For him it's just a din of noise and confusion. Nothing is making sense. That unbeliever is gonna quickly size up that situation: These people are nuts! These people are crazy! I'm outta here! We don't blame him.

Look, that's not just a terrible testimony to the order of God, to the clarity of God, to the perspicuity of God, and his, his clarity and his ability to make himself known and understood. This is an absolute fail when it comes to the purpose of the church. The church exists to make disciples, starting with *that guy*. Look at verse 24, "But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, and the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you."

When a church is saturated by the revealed Word of God, which is what prophecy was in their church in their day. When a church is saturated by the truth, unbelievers fall under conviction. Everyone's truth-saturated speech leaves the unbeliever with nowhere to run, nowhere to hide. The secrets of his heart are exposed because God's Word "cuts like a two-edged

sword," Hebrews 4:12-13, "and it pierces to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow," it goes deep "and it discerns the thoughts and intentions of the heart." It ferrets all that out. "And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him with whom we have," to do "to the one we got to give an account to." He sees it all. And if you've got something to hide, you don't want that kind of exposure. It's uncomfortable.

Some unbelievers, granted, are not going to fall on their face at that point and declare that God is among you, worship God. Some are going to flee from that kind of conviction, aren't they? Some are going to try to argue against it. Some are going to suppress the truth in unrighteousness, but you know what? No one can prevail against it. No argument can stand before the truth of God's Word. And when an unbeliever, though he flee, one day "every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of the father." And you know what's going to happen on that day? If he doesn't bow in your midst, he will bow on that day and he will declare, yep, when I was there, God was really among them. He'll acknowledge the truth.

Look, here's the point, whether it's unbelievers who need to be evangelized or whether its believers who need to be disciplined and edified, when we reinforce the truth with each other, we're putting into practice one of the most essential categories of the one another commands in the New Testament. It pleases God when we honor his Word, loving the truth, reinforcing Scripture among ourselves, humbling ourselves before it, uniting our minds around it, one mind, one heart.

Second one another action, not only are we to reinforce the truth, second, we're to honor one another. We're to honor one another, in fact, Paul says, Romans 12:10, "Outdo one another in showing honor." Wouldn't that be a great competition to have? Instead, of hey, I want the trophy! Hey, I want the ribbon! Say, how can I honor this person? Let's have a competition on honoring people. A very important one another command. There are others like it. I'm putting them all into this category honoring others; I'm shoving a number of the other one another commands into this because that's the main idea that undergirds all these one another commands I'm about to share, is honor. Honor, Paul says in Romans 15:7, "Welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you for the glory of God." That doesn't mean just, hey, good to have you here with us, shake a hand. That's not what he means by welcome. You could translate this accept one another. You could

translate it receive one another. This is a heart thing that manifests itself in an outward action thing. We're to be a welcoming people. Why? Because we honor people, because we honor those whom God loves.

There are four one another commands that have to do with this principle of honor, and these four commands have to do with holy kissing. Romans 16:16, "Greet one another with a holy kiss." I'm glad it's called a holy kiss; we need to qualify, holy. "All the churches of Christ greet you." 1 Corinthians 16:20, "All the brothers send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss." 2 Corinthians 13:12, "Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you." 1 Peter 5:14, again, "Greet one another with the kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ." Now don't worry, we're not going to enforce a hyper-literal application of those verses here in this church.

This Middle Eastern greeting, coming close to someone, kissing them on the cheek, you know what? There's a tenderness involved in that. I always think of Isaiah 6, when Isaiah is before the throne of God, and the, the seraphim are flying around pronouncing, "Holy, holy, holy!" And Isaiah is undone in the presence of holiness. And he says, "I'm a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips." He's like,

what am I going to do? I'm undone! And a seraph picks up a, takes the tongs, picks up a fire from the altar, and he touches it to his lips. Can you imagine a hot coal from a fire burning before the throne of God, touching the most sensitive part of your body? It would immediately cauterize those lips, probably burst into a huge blister. Pain, such pain! But the lips are one of the tenderest spots on the body, and there's a tenderness involved in greeting one another Middle Eastern style, greeting one another with a holy kiss. This nearness, this closeness, it signals reception. The guard comes down, the tendency toward self-protection is dropped, all in favor of showing full acceptance, full reception, unqualified welcome, bringing someone in underneath the armor. That's the idea, here. All those actions, welcoming, receiving, greeting with a kiss, those actions are based on this fundamental idea of honor, honor. So foreign in American society, isn't it? Where people are taught not to honor anybody but self.

The Old Testament word for honor is the word *kabod*. *Kabod*. It's sometimes translated glory. A literal translation of *kabod* is weighty, heavy. That's the core idea. When you honor someone, that person is weighty in your estimation. That person is treated with importance, heaviness, respect, reverence and that's the idea that carries into the New Testament as well. The

verb is *timaó*, meaning honor, revere, show respect, show esteem for others. Paul commands Timothy to "honor the widows who are widows indeed." You know what? Widows fall in a special category worthy of honor; honor widows indeed. 1 Timothy 5:3, "Elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor." 1 Timothy 5:17, "Slaves are to honor their masters." Have you ever thought about that? You go to work every day, ever thought about, I need to honor my supervisor. I need to honor my employer. I need to honor the brand I work for? I need to honor them. Honor, we're to show respect. We're to esteem these people; we're to honor them.

So back to that opening command, Romans 12:10, "Outdo one another in showing honor." It's not merely about external demonstrations of honor, pomp and circumstance, red carpets, award ceremonies, that kind of thing. It's not even primarily about summing up whether a person deserves honor or not. It's not about that. We used to say in the military, "Salute the rank, not the man." Salute the rank. It's why Romans 15:17 is so important, "Welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God."

Look, honoring others in the fellowship, it's about recognizing the worth, the value that every Christian has in the

sight of God. How precious each one is to Christ. Since Christ has welcomed each one of us, since he's received us, since he's purchased us with his own blood, would we dare shun anybody else? Would we dare disdain another Christian, hold that person at arm's length? Far be it from us, right? Far be it from us.

Every Christian is to be honored by every other Christian. We honor one another for the sake of Christ, and not only that, but we recognize, we esteem, those whom Christ has placed in unique positions and special roles among us. We honor one another because we want to honor Christ. We honor one another because we want to submit our judgment to his. We want to subordinate our preferences to his manifest wisdom in choosing that person, uniting him to this body.

So let's get practical. How do we do that here at Grace Church? How do we do that here? Well, maybe we could start by building relationships with one another, right? Maybe we could start by preferring those relationships over other relationships. If God chose these people, gathered them here to belong to this assembly of blood-bought saints, well maybe we could spend a little time to get to know them, just to spend some time to figure out God's wisdom is in drawing them into this fellowship.

So try inviting, practically speaking, here it is, practice steps, practical applications, invite somebody over to your home. The people in this room are important to Christ. They should be important to you as well. Get out of your comfort zone. Be willing to break your routines. Be willing to invest your time in getting to know the saints and that may involve you reprioritizing your time a bit. It may involve you cutting out some time-consuming activities that clutter your schedule; got to make room in your schedule for honoring the saints. It's a command, here. You say, well, I've got a lot of family in the area. I'm pretty well connected already. I'm not really too needy, doing fine in the relationships department. Well, family relationships are important, that's true. But they're to be subordinated in importance, so you show a higher honor to the family of God. You say, where do you get that idea?

You know what? I get it from Jesus. Matthew chapter 12 verses 46 to 50 says, "While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him and he replied to the man who told him, 'Who is my mother and who are my brothers?'" That's kind of odd, isn't it? "Stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the

will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.'"

Is that how you think? If it's not, let's grow. I understand. I understand that people are hard, that we are the source of trial to one another sometimes. I know I'm the source of trial to a lot of people, starting with my wife. But she's so gracious, and we need to be gracious with one another. If Jesus considers his church family as more important than his birth parents, more important than his blood relatives, his siblings, shouldn't we? Shouldn't those who do the will of our father in heaven be more precious to us than those who don't, even though they're our own flesh and blood? Sometimes our misplaced sympathies blind us to the true significance of the saints around us. Beloved, we need to see that. We need to see God's children are so important. "What we are," 1 John 3:2, "What we are has not yet appeared, not yet been revealed, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him because we shall see him as he is."

There is something special wrapped up in each one of us that God has yet to reveal. And it's not in us. It's not inherent in us. It's what he's done in us. So get to know the folks in this church now. Invite the saints into your home. Eat

meals together. Go for walks. Spend time at the park. Talk about life and theology. Talk about family. Talk about evangelism, church, discipleship, parenting, growing old together. Talk about it all.

Young people, get to know the older people. Learn from their years of experience on the earth, from their mistakes as well as their triumph. There's a lot to be learned even from bad examples, right? I've got a pile of mistakes I could share with you, and you could learn from that. I don't want you to make the same ones. So ask older people questions. Learn what they count to be important now, at this end of their life, as they reflect on the lives that they've lived. Honor them. Esteem them. Serve them with your youthful energy, with your strength.

Older people, consider the stewardship God has given you with the younger people in this church. God expects you to invest in the younger generation, to lead them, to guide them, to disciple them. Do not disdain them because they are young. Honor them. Esteem them as more important than yourself. The stewardship God has given you to disciple these young people means you need to be active and aggressive in reinforcing the truth with them. Speak the truth, encourage, instruct, exhort, admonish, all that. Practice the truth in, in front of them so

they can see your life, the outcome of your faith. In fact, help them make the connections. Help them see and understand not only how you live, but why you live how you live. They need to understand that.

When it comes to ministry in the local church, you know what? You need to put young people in positions of responsibility, lower responsibility at first, and then raise it. You need to let them try, test their ideas, allow them to even fail. Then be gracious when they do fail because you've failed. You know what it's like. Teach them through the responsibility because you're handing over the mantle of leadership to this next generation. You need to consider that you are the older people who have a stewardship of younger people in your midst. You need to hand it on to them as you set your eyes on heaven.