

“One Another” in Practice

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Introduction.

- A. In the world of corporate buzzwords, one of the most commonly used is the word “synergy.” Synergy is the idea that the whole is more than the sum of its parts, that sometimes, when you add two and two, you get five instead of four. This concept, of course, is actually quite old, and among other places, it shows up in Ecclesiastes 4:12. It’s much easier to break three strands separately than one strand together.
- B. This is the same idea that underlies the Lord’s church, both in a defensive and an offensive sense. By ourselves, we are both incapable of defending ourselves against Satan and of doing God’s work the way that He wants it done. Together, though, things are very different. Not only can we resist the devil together, but we can also work together to help enlarge the kingdom of God. We depend on one another.
- C. Satan knows this just as well as anybody, and that’s why many of his efforts are directed toward disrupting the unity of the local church. He wants us to separate ourselves from the body by getting us to forsake the assembly, and he wants to disrupt the body itself by filling it with backbiting and gossip. It’s all well and good for us to understand that we can’t let him do that, but it’s another thing entirely for us to know what we have to do to stop him. Thankfully, we have all the information about this that we need in God’s word. The Bible is an infinitely practical book, and it contains a number of practical, ground-floor tips for treating one another as we should. Let’s look this morning, then, at how we need to love one another in practice.

I. General Rules of Thumb.

- A. A general, Scriptural look at this topic must begin by examining two things that we must not do to one another. First, the Scripture instructs us **NOT TO JUDGE ONE ANOTHER**. Paul makes this point in Romans 14:13. As we’ve seen before, Romans 14 is a chapter that concerns itself with matters of the individual conscience, and this is one of the most important principles of that chapter. In context, Paul is telling us that we have no right to start applying our individual human notions of right and wrong to other people. Certainly, we are allowed and in fact required to tell other Christians what God’s word says and expect them to live according to that standard, but we cannot expect others to live according to our standards. It’s not our place to make rules in the kingdom of heaven because we aren’t the King. It’s not our place to enforce those rules on others, it’s not our place to tell others what those rules are, and it’s not even our place to apply those rules to others in our heads. If we want to make up rules for ourselves to live by, fine, but it has to stop there.
- B. In similar fashion, James tells us, **“DO NOT SPEAK EVIL OF ONE ANOTHER.”** This Scriptural concept appears in James 4:11. In this immediate context, it’s apparent that James is saying something similar to our first point, but it’s equally legitimate to apply this even beyond the realm of binding what God has not bound. The Bible tells us that wherever two or three are gathered together in God’s name, He is present in their midst. Sadly, though, folks spend too much time gathered together in twos or threes, speaking evil of a brother or sister who is not present. They could be pronouncing judgments in the Romans 14 sense, or they could be engaging in plain old gossip. Friends, whenever we find ourselves talking about a brother, we need to ask ourselves why we’re talking about him. Is it because we love him and want what’s best for him, or is it because we feel malice in our hearts toward him and we want to tear him down to build ourselves up? If the latter’s the case, if we’re talking about another Christian without love in our hearts, we need to kill the conversation immediately and do everything we can even to crush the unloving thoughts that started the whole thing. Gossip is serious evil, friends, and we need to hate it and reject it at all times.
- C. On the positive side of things, we have a responsibility to **SUBMIT TO ONE ANOTHER**. That’s the message that Ephesians 5:20-21 conveys. As you might recognize from the citation, this is the introductory passage to Paul’s discussion of responsibilities in relationships. Sometimes, we say that it’s the job of wives, children, and servants to submit. That’s true but incomplete. Submission isn’t just for wives, children, and servants. It’s for all Christians. The husband is to submit to the wife by loving her as Christ loved the church. The father is to submit to the child by patiently instructing him in righteousness. The master is to submit to the servant by treating him in a kind and fair way. No matter who we are, friends, no matter what our status is, our basic responsibility is the same. We are to esteem the other more than ourselves and seek their good, not ours.
- D. Finally, in this general sort of instruction, we are told to **BE HOSPITABLE TOWARD ONE ANOTHER**. Look at Peter’s thoughts on the matter in 1 Peter 4:9. The basic idea of hospitality is that we are to love Christians who are strangers to us and act accordingly. Back in the time of the first century, this was important because it ensured that a Christian who was traveling would be able to stay the night with another Christian. Nowadays, of course, traveling brethren are more likely to stay at the Holiday Inn than they are with another brother, but there are still important applications of this principle for us today. This tells us how we need to treat the strangers with whom we worship. These people might be unknown to us because they’ve only

recently come to the area, or, more embarrassingly, they might be people we've assembled with for years without so much as finding out their names. We need to be willing to bring these people into our homes and into our lives. Remember, friends: an isolated Christian is an endangered Christian. Satan loves to run along the edge of the flock and pick off the sheep who have become separated from the others. When we attack that separation by bringing other Christians closer to us, we make Satan's job that much harder.

II. Specific "One Another" Actions.

- A. In a more specific sense in our dealings with one another, we are to **BEAR WITH ONE ANOTHER**. Look at Paul's admonition on the subject in Ephesians 4:1-2. This reminds me, actually, of the way that a momma dog deals with her puppies. The puppies are everywhere, tussling with each other, biting each other, biting Mom, and Mom just watches it all with this patient, resigned expression on her face. That's bearing with. That's when we could be annoyed by something that our brother is doing, but we choose not to be, because maintaining unity and peace in the body is more important than expressing our displeasure and offense. This isn't to say, of course, that we are to bear with the sin of our brother. That's not it at all, and we have a responsibility to correct that. However, when our brother isn't sinning, no matter how obnoxious his behavior may be, it's just not our problem. Instead of getting upset, we just need to learn to bear with him.
- B. Of course, the flip side of this is that in cases where sin has been committed, we have a responsibility to **FORGIVE ONE ANOTHER**. So says Paul in Ephesians 4:32. In theory, this is something that we all readily agree to. In practice, though, it's a lot more difficult than that. It reminds me, actually, of a nasty situation that went down in a church in Texas. The preacher of this congregation had been caught cheating on his wife with one of the sisters there. Matters went from there as you might expect. The preacher repented and resigned, but one of the leading women of the congregation declared that no matter what, she would never forgive him for what he had done. I don't have to work too hard to see where she was coming from. For one thing, the sister he'd cheated with was her daughter, and I can only imagine the anger, shame, and betrayal that this mother must have felt. But brethren, no matter what another Christian does to us, whether it's something like that or even worse, no matter what they do, we NEVER have the right to withhold forgiveness. Sure, that low-down brother or sister might not deserve our forgiveness, but the forgiveness of the Bible is not something that has to be deserved. We sure don't deserve anything from God but death, yet He forgives each one of us anyway. If we do not forgive, neither will our Father in heaven forgive us.
- C. In a different but equally sensitive area, God instructs us to **COMFORT ONE ANOTHER**. We have this from Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:18. In context, here's what's going on: Paul has just gotten through telling the Thessalonians how they need to respond to the loss of some of their brethren who have just died. Paul explains that unlike the unbelievers around them, the remaining Christians don't have to fall into an abyss of sorrow. The day will come when Jesus will return and resurrect those loved ones from the dead. That still holds true for us today. We live in the midst of a death-fearing culture, but death holds no particular terror to the child of God, and when a brother or sister falls asleep in Jesus, the loss is ours, not theirs. In these times of sorrow, let's remind one another that all who love God will be united together with Him in heaven.
- D. When the problem we are dealing with is not the sin of others or the death of others, but our own sin, God's word tells us that we are to **CONFESS OUR SINS TO ONE ANOTHER**. This is James' point in James 5:16. This can be a tough one. There are many commands in the Bible that Christians obey more or less willingly, but then there are some commands that just about all of us balk at a little, and this is one of those commands. We hate confessing our sins to one another. It seems a little too like a denominational practice, and besides, when we do, it makes us look bad. We all spend a great deal of effort constructing this image of perfection for our brethren in the assembly, and we hate to let that mask slip even a little bit. So we ignore this command.
- E. In reality, of course, every last one of us has flaws behind the mask, as we'll find out if we muster the courage to be honest with one another. Of course, sadly, not every brother can be trusted with our darkest secrets. We need to show wisdom in obeying this command, but we still have to obey it. We need to find someone we can confide in. They could be our spouse, or a close friend, or an elder, but there needs to be somebody with whom we can unburden ourselves. It's important to confess our sins, and we need to start the practice.
- F. In this same verse, we see the final "one another" command we're going to look at in this lesson, and that's the command to **PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER**. The specific context here is pretty obvious. Once we're done confessing our sins to one another, we're to pray together so that we can receive God's forgiveness. The Bible tells us to do it, so we need to do it. However, this is something we need to do even beyond the immediate context of confession. I fear that most Christians spend an awful lot of time praying for themselves and maybe their families, and not very much time praying for the other members of the congregation. I'd be the first to admit that this is something I struggle with. It doesn't come naturally to me, and I have to think about it before I do it. We need to recognize, though, brethren, that this is something we need to do. Just because I'm a preacher, I get prayed for a lot, and I'm convinced that those prayers have made a massive difference in my work here and in my life. Everybody here needs prayers like that. Let's be sure to provide them.

Conclusion. If you need us to pray for you tonight, or help you to God in some other way, let us know now.