

Love One Another

One Another Duties

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Bible Text: Romans 13:8; John 13:34; 15:12,17
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Well, brethren, this morning as we begin, I want to set out before you some poetic lines. Our poet is Isaac Watts, his psalter hymns frequently among those we sing. Isaac Watts wrote,

"Let dogs delight to bark and bite,
For God has made them so:
Let bears and lions growl and fight,
For 'tis their nature, too.

But, children, you should never let
Such angry passions rise:
Your little hands were never made
To tear each other's eyes."

Watts's lines speak to what we may remember for some of us from our long ago days, the early days of our lives. His lines speak to what more recently we may have observed and that is, in the language of last week, children do not always play together well. Angry passions lead to the conflict of angry words and angry deeds, and what is more disturbing is that God's children don't always play together well and, brethren, as a statement of purpose concerning our recently commenced series on the "one another" text of the New Testament, one expression of purpose could be this: may God who made us his children both by regeneration and adoption and called us to dwell together in his house, may he be glorified by means of these children playing together well, living, worshiping, praying, ministering, serving, caring, witnessing together cooperatively, supportively, peacefully, sympathetically, brotherly unto the end that we might truly live out our function as a church, that function epitomized in the language of the apostle to Timothy, the pillar and ground of the truth. It is a painful and enfeebling reality that God's children don't always play together well and thus, fellow children, let us be diligent against the pride, the selfishness, the squabbling, the tempers and tantrums, the pouting which can be observed in sandbox or on the playground or in the backyard. Let us, fellow children, be vigilant to that and play together well as children of God and our concern is this, local house of God, may our determination be to play together well in this local new covenant house.

Now, brethren, two Lord's Days ago, we took up, technically speaking, the reciprocal pronoun that is found repetitiously in the New Testament and usually translated "one another." That pronoun was focused upon and explained. The oft used pronoun signifies, simply put, mutual duty among a number of people who are alike. That's us. We are a number of people in Christ, we are alike, and as we are going to take up this morning, we have mutual duties.

There was read two weeks ago a litany of 50+ "one another" passages. We considered in the first of the introductory messages that the primary immediate sphere of application for the "one another" passages is emphatically the local church of Jesus Christ, that is evident by the elementary observation that so many of the "one another" commands, exhortations, prohibitions and warnings are addressed to local churches, to assemblies of God's children living in close relationships with one another, living in committed, glue-together, and that's exactly the sense of the term you heard expounded in the last hour, living together in committed brotherly relations. The urgency of application for the "one another" passages is right here this morning with those who are sitting in the pews with you. There's really no challenge when there are occasional, casual, distant relationships with brethren far and wide that makes little demand of us, but when we live together and we rub shoulders together and we spend time together all in the context of being imperfectly renewed sinners with remaining sin, well, I don't have to tell you what the potential for that is, and the remedy is the application of the "one another" passages.

Now, secondly, we have noted in the two introductory messages that the foundational reality which makes of a diverse people "one anothers." The text, perhaps as clear as any other, maybe clearer, it sets out this fundamental reality, is in Romans 12, beginning at verse 4, "For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many," we are a number of people, "so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another." What makes us members one of another? It is the common life we have in Christ. We are "one anothers," we are constituted "one anothers" by a common life, the life of our living head who gives life to each member of the body; we are children of the same heavenly Father by the same birth and living together with one another in his house. Now again among the observations that have been made, there was also this one: among the "one another" texts that have been identified there is some considerable repetition. The 50+ texts do not foreshadow necessarily 50+ messages. I became more particular with percentages, just over 30%, 30 point something, of the identified "one another" passages speak to one theme and that's the matter of love. Speak to that theme described by Thomas Watson as, "The queen of graces which outshines all the others as the sun, the lesser planets."

Well, brethren, this morning we are now going to take up this theme, the theme so often addressed by the "one another" passages, the theme of loving one another, and what I purpose to do this morning and perhaps certainly in one more message if not two, is to encompass 16 "love one another" texts under the following alliterated headings, and if you have your outline, I want to review those headings. This is the road map marking out where we are going. We will begin in a few minutes with the first of the headings: the chief is love. We're going to take up among the graces of the Christ-like excellencies of

the New Testament that which is chief; that which is of highest rank; that which is of first importance. The chief. I left off the definite article for the sake of the alliteration, chief is love.

Then secondly: the command to love. The imperative. The authoritative directive to love and the several texts will be identified later.

We will come, and I trust this morning in part, to the third of the headings: the character of love. Its primary features. Its attributes. Its characteristics, and there are at least bound up in the "one another" passages four characteristics: it is brotherly, and that is probably as far as we will get in this hour; it is to be fervent; it is to be sincere; and it is to be self-denying. At least those four features or characteristics can plainly be found discovered in the "one another" passages.

Fourthly, one of our favorites, some of us Reformed Baptist words: the copiousness of love. If something is copious, it is abundant, it is full, there is a lot of it, and we'll be taking up the texts that instruct us in the church, that there are to be copious measures of love for one another. Not scant, not occasional, but abundant and plentiful.

Then, fifthly: the conclusion from love. When there is love of this character copiously demonstrated, what conclusions can we draw? Well, among them, limiting ourselves to the "one another" passages, we can conclude we are taught by God. This kind of love is not native to man. We can conclude we know God, 1 John 4:7. And then John 13:35, and we are Christ's disciples.

Brethren, we want God's children to play together well and love, loving one another is the first essential. I acknowledge that much has been preached in this place on love, most recently Galatians 5:22, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love"; much preached on love in connection with 2 Peter 1:7, Colossians 3:14, and there are probably other texts. What we are now taking up will be, for the most part, limited by these "one another" passages. Not entirely but for the most part.

Well with that said, we take up now the first of the five headings, the chief is love, and the truth that I intend to convey by that first heading is expressed again in the language of John Owen, "Love is the fountain of all duties toward God and man," and he cites Matthew 23:37, "The substance of all rules that concern the saints, the bond of communion, the fulfilling of the law, the advancement of the honor of Christ Jesus, and the glory of the Gospel love, is the fountain, the rule, scope, aim and fruit of Gospel communion, and of no one thing of present performance is the doctrine of the Lord Jesus more excellent and eminent above all other directions than in this, mutual, intense, affectionate love among his followers, and for this he gives them innumerable precepts, exhortations and motives, but above all his own heavenly example." Owens's words comprehend what I mean by the first of the five headings: the chief is love.

Now concerning giving warrant for viewing love as that Christ-like excellence, that Spirit-wrought virtue of greatest importance, of highest rank, I set before you the

following. We can deduce that the chief is love, we can deduce the truth of Owen's words from the numerous repetition of "love one another." More than anything else, the "one another" passages concern love.

Secondly, from one of these passages, Romans 13:8, we read the following, "Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor," literally the other, "has fulfilled the law." And at verse 10 of Romans 13, "love," therefore, "is the fulfillment of the law." Now we considered nearly identical words again back in Galatians 5. The sense is this: the vessel, if we were to view the law that way, the vessel of the law is filled up brim-full with obedience by loving one another. Love, loving one another, loving our neighbor pours into the vessel of the law a full measure of obedience. That truth supports the contention that the chief is love.

Further, moving beyond the "one another" text briefly, what is said concerning love in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 that concludes, "but do not have love," I may have a lot else but if I do not have love what's the conclusion? "It profits me nothing." The introductory comment to 1 Corinthians 13 is found at the end of chapter 12, "I show you a still more excellent way," that is, of how to edify one another; that's been the subject. What's the "still more excellent way" of how to edify one another? Well, chapter 13 identifies love, and about that love, it is described, "the greatest of these is love."

I contend again, love is chief, but beyond that in a nearly equivalent construction that really just has a fine line of difference from the "one another" passages, 1 Peter 4:8, "Above all," before all things, "keep fervent in your love for one another." Now technically that "one another" is a reflexive pronoun that I'll not pause to describe again, maybe on Wednesday night. But the point there is this, "Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another." Before all things, it's the language of what is supreme, paramount, foremost. It is love. The chief is love.

Excerpting from Jonathan Edwards, "All virtue that is saving and that distinguishes true Christians from others is summed up in Christian love. Charity, love, is the life and soul of all religion without which all things that wear the name of virtues are empty and vain." That's what 1 Corinthians 13 teaches. "Love appears to be the sum of all the virtue and duty that God requires of us and therefore must undoubtedly be the most essential thing, the sum of all that virtue that is essential and distinguishing in real Christianity. Love is the main principle in the heart of a real Christian."

The chief amongst the excellencies bound up in the "one another" passages, the chief is love. If we're going to play together well as God's children in this, his house, it starts with the essential. Now secondly, following the outline we come to the command to love, that is, the authoritative order, the authoritative directive, the obligation, the "ought to love one another," and we should understand what is intended by the heading is that love is a moral imperative. It is not something which can be attended to only when I'm in the mood or possess certain feelings conducive to loving actions.

John 13:34, "A new commandment I give to you," here's the new commandment, "that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another." Now one might ask if one recalls the Old Testament, such a text as Leviticus 19:18, what's new about this commandment? It's not absolutely new, the newness of this authoritative word is probably to be understood in terms of the example of Christ's self-denying love for them, and this being the basis and the model for their loving one another. As one writes, love itself is not a new commandment but an old one. The new thing appears to be the mutual affection that Christians have for one another on account of Christ's love for them. A brotherhood has been created on the basis of Jesus' work for men and there is a new relationship within that brotherhood.

In John 15:12, "This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you." And again in John 15:17, "This I command you, that you love one another." And then in 1 John 3:23, "This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ," that's one side of the coin of this commandment, "and love one another, just as He commanded us," that's the other side. A two-sided commandment that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, and what God has joined together let no man rend asunder.

We should note, brethren, to love one another, first, is a moral imperative. It is not something that can rest with regard to motivation upon our passing, vacillating, ever-changing moods and feelings. Secondly, the nature, the specific nature of the love that is commanded is self-denying, self-giving, self-expending, demonstrative love. That is what is signified by "just as I have loved you." Self-expenditure, sacrifice, self-denying demonstrations of love, they are not always convenient, they take thought, they take time, they take your money, they take your energy, they wear you out, but that's the nature of the love commandment. Then again, the focus of the application. Who's the focus upon? It's upon you and I who are members of this church, one another.

The words of Bishop Ryle, "Let us take heed that this well-known grace is not merely a notion in our heads but a practice in our lives. Of all the commands of our Master, there is none which is so much talked about but so little obeyed, yet if we mean anything when we profess to have love toward all men, it ought to be seen in our tempers, our words, our bearing, our doing, and specially it ought to show itself forth in our dealing with other Christians. We should regard them as brethren and sisters and delight to do anything to promote their happiness. Christ's cause in the earth would prosper far more than it does if this simple law, this commandment, 'love one another as I have loved you,' were obeyed." Ryle writes, "A precept like this should stir us up to searchings of heart. It condemns the selfish, ill-natured, jealous, ill-tempered spirit of many professing Christians with a sweeping condemnation. Sound views of doctrine, knowledge of controversy will avail us nothing at last if we have known nothing of love. Without charity, we may pass muster very well as churchmen, but without charity, without love, we are no better says Paul, 'than a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.' Where there is no Christ-like love, there is no grace, there is no work of the Spirit, there is no reality in the religion that we may profess with our lips."

The chief is love, the command of love, and now thirdly and finally this morning, the character of love, that is, what are some of the distinctive marks, the features of this love, what is its nature, what sort or kind of love is it? Well, again, limiting by and large the answer to the "one another" passages, I set out in the first place this morning, and this is as far as we will go but it's going to take a while to get there, among four features.

It is brotherly. Turn in your Bibles, please, to Romans 12. Romans 12 and the beginning of verse 10. This is where we're going to park now for a while. "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love." Now the King James reads and I actually prefer this, "Be kindly affectioned to one another with brotherly love." The old ASV translates, "In love of the brethren be tenderly affectioned to one another." J. B. Phillips, "Let us have real warm affection for one another as between brothers." His interpretation is right on target. Right on target, his paraphrase.

Now, to take some time to unfold Romans 12:10a. You are very aware, I trust if by nothing more than your own experience, you are very aware of that instinctive, natural, strong affection of the inner man toward your blood relations. Is everybody aware of that? The kind of instinctive affection that a mother has for her children. It is observable in human nature and revealed in the Bible that there is a natural constitutional movement of love toward others in close relation to us. In our men's prayer meeting yesterday, we talked about briefly this kind of love and how it applies to a husband. As was said then and at other times with regard to this constitutional affection that a man has for his wife, one of its manifestations is his instinctive reaction to protect his wife. If someone threatens your wife, men, you do not need to read a book about what to do. You do not need to listen to a sermon to instruct you, "Okay, what do I do now, somebody's threatening my wife?" No, God has built that into you. It's instinctive.

Now in the New Testament, the particular term for this kind of instinctive natural affection in its root form is used twice, and some of you recall this from previous exposition. It's used in Romans 1:31 in a larger context of homosexuality, and it's used in 2 Timothy 3:3, and how it's translated and translated very well in both passages, having a negative prefix, it is translated by the King James "without natural affection." It's translated that way because its root signifies natural affection. The homosexual does not have natural affection, and in the latter days men will be without natural affection. We were reminded, some of us, on Monday night of just how egregious that bankruptcy of natural affection can be when a mother murders the child in her womb. That's without natural affection. That's when convenience trumps natural affection.

Now look at Romans 12:10. Where the NAS translates "be devoted," where the King James translates "be kindly affectioned," the ASV "tenderly affectioned," what do we have? We have the root for natural affection compounded with another term that can mean friend, beloved, dear or devoted. In summary, the construction signifies what I will call a spiritually natural, that seems like being opposite, but a spiritually natural instinctive affection for members one of another. Analogous to what we have in our blood relationships, we have in the church. That's the point. In the language of John Murray commenting on this particular term again rendered in the NAS "be devoted," "It

is plain in the present instance the fellowship of the saints is viewed as a family relationship." Why does he say that? Because of the term here that signifies natural affection amongst blood relatives and Paul's using it with regard to us in the church.

In the present instance, the fellowship of saints is viewed as a family relation and demanding, therefore, that which corresponds in the life of the church to the affection which the members of a family have for one another. As members of one family, thus, born of the same Spirit, brothers and sisters one to another with the same Father, what is Paul saying here? He is saying there is a spiritually instinctive love for one another. In the realm of the Spirit who has worked the new birth, who has united us to Christ as members of the body to the head, there is a spiritually natural affection between the children of God that is analogous to that which we see in the realm of flesh and blood family relations.

What does that lead us to conclusion-wise conclusion? We ought not to have to be prodded and pleaded with to love one another because if we are in Christ, there is this element of love percolating within us, it's simply there by the new birth. We ought not have to be prodded with and pleaded to love one another anymore than a mother ought to have to be prodded and pleaded with to love her child, or a man ought to be pleaded with to have affection for his wife. These things are instinctive. Such affection, the affection of Romans 12:10 to say it simply, runs in the family, be it your flesh and blood family or your eternal family. Paul is speaking of a dimension of love that runs in the family. In the language of another, the efflux of love. Efflux means something that's poured out; it comes; the efflux of love toward other brethren.

It's illustrated perhaps in a number of ways surely, but as I think of my own experience, it's illustrated upon meeting a Christian for the first time in a new place, the kind of thing that that man and that man are going to experience in a few months in Africa. When you are with folks who socioeconomically, educationally, racially are different, they're different in every way except one and that one is enough to wed your hearts to them instantly, that's the kind of love we're talking about, spiritually instinctive love.

It tells us also, this particular term, it tells us that there is an emotional element to our love for one another. How do we know that? Well, think of the analogy. Mothers, do you feel anything for your offspring? Husbands for your wives? Wives for your husbands? Any feeling bound up in your affection for your blood kin? Resoundingly yes. So it is for your spiritual kin.

There is an emotional dimension to the love Christians have for one another. There is an element of fellow feeling granted. The laying out of one's self which is the essence of agape love, that dimension of love is not governed by my emotions, that dimension of love, Christian love, self-denying love, is a reasoning, choosing, acting love, arising out of the renewed soul, yet agape is not heartless, it is not mechanical, it is not stoical and icy and unfeeling. There is a warmth of heart to some measure felt for its object and this is indicated, again, by what we are looking at in Romans 12:10, there is a devoted kindred affection for one another.

Now this is intensified even more by what follows, "Be devoted to one another," have this kindred spiritually natural affection for your spiritual kin, for one another, "in brotherly love," the compound that can read "brother-loving." Now this is love. Love that is evoked, philo-delphia is the word, we get Philadelphia from it, this is love evoked by having things in common with each other; love evoked by what we share. Shared experiences, shared backgrounds, shared influences, it's the love as has often been identified here the love of affinity for one another; the love of delight; the love of attraction aroused by common experiences as well as by qualities in others that are appealing to us, love connected to perceiving in one another certain traits and ways that we admire. It's the kind of love that is often used to describe the love that friends have for one another, friendships being welded by things shared, things appealing, traits attractive, and in the New Testament this kind of love is often spoken of in terms of its existence amongst the people of God.

1 Thessalonians 4: 9, "Now as to," and the term is translated, "love of the brethren," "Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another," and there it is a combination of this love of affinity and agape self-denying love. Hebrews 13:1, "Let," philadelphia, "love of the brethren continue." And in 1 Peter 1:22, a text that we'll spend some time with, Lord willing, in our next time together, "Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere," over against perfunctory, over against pretentious, over against hypocritical, "for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart." Again, combining philo-delphia with a verbal form of agape, the love of affinity and the love of spending myself for my brother.

Returning to Romans 12:10, "Be devoted to one another," kindred spiritually natural affection for one another in this sphere, in this relation of friends in Christ, brothers in Christ, those who appeal to me because of what we share, because we're both being made unto the image of the Lord Jesus. There ought to be appeal bound up in that, that which draws us out to one another because we are sharing the same sanctifying refining process, being made after the same excellencies that marked the perfect God-man.

In the language of John Brown, "This affection," this philadelphia affection, "this affection is founded on the Christianity both of subject and object. It is an affection which only a Christian can cherish and which he can cherish only towards one whom he regards as a Christian. The affection originates in the possession of a peculiar mode of thinking and feeling produced in the mind by the Holy Spirit through the knowledge and belief of Christian truth which naturally leads those who are thus distinguished to a sympathy of mind, sympathy of feeling, of thought and affection with all who under the same influences have been led to entertain the same views, to cherish the same dispositions. It is based on relations, sentiments, disposition, pursuits, trials, enjoyments and hopes common to them." That's right at the core of what this philadelphia requires, it requires commonality; that which is shared.

Paul writes, "Be devoted to one another," kindred affection, "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love," in the sphere of the love of affinity and delight in those others who share in common with you. Brethren, that's what we need here, more of it. Now we are going to consider some further characteristics of this love, it is not only brotherly, it is fervent, it is to be sincere, and it is to be self-denying, but in conclusion back to Romans 12:10, back to this matter of brotherly love, if we are going to be devoted to one another in the realm of this love of affinity for one another, we must give regular thought to what we share, regular thought to what unites us, and then, brethren, view what bugs us about one another through those lens.

Now we can always find something, I suppose, with one another that irritates and annoys. I mean, if you put on, as it were, magnifying glasses for your lens, you and I are always going to find something that's going to bug us about one another. I have no doubt you'll find empty in me that bugs you. And if that's what we focus upon, we'll have precious little of brotherly love. We need to focus on what our commonalities are; what we share; what unites us; what is attractive and appealing in that other, especially in those who aggravate us. They may aggravate us but what about their love for God? Is that not appealing? What about their family order after God's design, does that not mean anything? What about their faithfulness to Christ's church? What about their moral courage and principle living in an enticing world? Does that not outweigh whatever the little bugaboo is you had with them? What about their willingness to speak for Christ? What about the mosaic of Christ-like virtues evident in their lives? The point is, in times of agitation, we need to have a self-awareness that our tendency is to be blinded to such things as those and to magnify the faults of one another. If we don't break that tendency, Romans 12:10 will go for naught in our church order. It is easy in the midst of frustration with one another to get a kind of amnesia with regard to what we share in common, with regard to what that one with whom I'm irritated has contributed, it is easy in the midst of frustration to see nothing but the negative, nothing but sin, nothing but the issue which provokes. It is easy to become fixated upon the irritant and to lose the bigger picture, to lose the brotherly perspective, and if it's lost, the result may well be social retreat, avoidance and the cold shoulder.

Paul says, "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love." Granted a church member may need to be put in mind of his sin, a member may be provoking and even repulsive and he or she must repent, but whatever the case, brotherly kindness, brotherly love, spiritually natural affection, these things must not be casualties. Brotherly love requires the cultivation and the maintenance of clear and frequent thinking probably best done on our knees about what we have in common. Children of the same heavenly Father. Subjects of the same King. Citizens of the same kingdom. Fellows heirs of the same inheritance. That's seeing the bigger picture to the end that we might be devoted to one another in brotherly love.

Brethren, who is that person, who are those persons to whom you might show in the week ahead brotherly love? What is one way, what is one expression of devoted affection and brotherly love that you could manifest to that one in the week ahead? Beware, brethren, when you're trying to identify that one or more and the manner of demonstrating your

brotherly love, beware of such things as self-absorption and carnal busyness and laziness drowning the impulse. Especially beware of the influence of what can be the reality, there are few givers and many takers, no reciprocity. We must not be stymied by that. In the week ahead, may we assign a few names and a few ways. To the words of the apostle, "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love."

Let us pray.

Father, may we be fellow children living in Your house who know more and more of kindly affection and brotherly love one for another. Father, in our times of irritation and passion, that we pause long enough to pray for a larger clearer perspective, the perspective of a common life in our Father's house, a perspective including the virtues and the benefits wrought by that brother or sister. And Father, whatever the irritants may be, the offenses may be, may we see more than simply them and, Father, all to the end that in this place there would be children, children of God living in Your house kindly affectioned to one another in the midst of brotherly love. Lord, may such things be realities amongst us and we pray in the name of our elder brother the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.