

ONE ANOTHER

*Short Devotional Studies
on the Biblical Teaching
on Christian Relationships*

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ONE ANOTHER

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1. INTRODUCTION

This series of Bible Studies focuses on the importance of our relationship with one another. I was impressed some while ago by the number of times in the New Testament the phrase ‘one another’ is used – there are over thirty references.

The apostles, inspired by the Holy Spirit and following the example of Jesus Christ, placed great emphasis on this issue. They gave wide-ranging teaching on the subject. For example, in *1 John* the Apostle often refers to ‘loving one another’.

The issue of Christian relationships must have been one which challenged the Church a great deal to warrant such emphasis. So in our own day we must not be surprised if the same type of challenges face us in our own churches.

To develop in our relationships with one another does not require a trip to a Christian bookshop. The Word of God is far better than a ‘how to’ book, however well-meaning it might be. We will often need help in this area and that help is found in the Word of God, given by the grace of God to enable us to follow the exhortations for the benefit of one another.

Therefore it is important for us to study this matter in some depth to be helped in improving our own relationships. Presenting these exhortations in their context provides a manual for meaningful Christian relationships. We will simply go through a number of the references to build a biblical pattern to follow.

These messages were delivered covering two or three headings in one evening and consequently vary in length.

2. LOVE ONE ANOTHER

‘A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another’ John 13.34.

We start with this exhortation for two reasons. Firstly, it is given by the Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church, our Foundation, Guide and Cornerstone. Secondly, all the other exhortations to ‘one another’ are the fruit and outcome of loving one another.

But why does the Lord say that loving one another is a new commandment when it is in the Ten Commandments? He does so because love is to be the first hallmark of the followers of Jesus. When we follow the example of the Lord Jesus, love is demonstrated in a deeper, fuller manner.

Jesus taught that the Law is summarised by love to God and love to our neighbour. The command is new in the context of the Gospel of God which teaches us the essence of Christian love. It is to be sacrificial and selfless, exercised for the glory of God and for the good of our neighbour. It is a love which is exercised with a willing obedience to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, for He commands us to love one another as He has loved us.

This exhortation to love as a fruit of the Gospel, in its Christ-centred sense, was new. The emphasis upon sacrificial, selfless love was new, for it characterises the heart of true Christianity. Loving one another sacrificially requires of us to put the other person before ourselves – unselfish love. Loving one another sacrificially also means denying self and taking second place, in the interests of exercising selfless love, following the example of Christ.

To love one another as Christ loved us requires effort, struggle, pain, rejection, wrestling and perseverance. As the Apostle Peter teaches, it means to love sincerely with a fervent love. This word ‘fervent’ is a

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very strong word in the Greek. It means constantly to stretch yourself in love, an intense strain, to feel at times to be on the rack in love.

As our example, Christ went to Calvary via Gethsemane because of His sacrificial love for the Church. This experience for Him was one of intense pain and suffering in body and soul; it was costly, sacrificial love.

Alexander Smellie wrote the following in his devotional book 'The Secret Place' in 1907 on the phrase, '*the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge*' *Ephesians 3.19*:

'No love stoops like Christ's love. It travelled from the heights of Heaven, to the depths of sinful earth. God, pure and holy, in His love chose voluntarily to make His home with me a sinner!

No love suffers like Christ's love. The test of affection is its willingness to suffer sacrifice and pain for another. Never has any affection stood the test like the love of Jesus. He made the supreme offering of His life for me. Such bitterness, such dereliction, such unspeakable sorrow there were in my Saviour's death. For me He bore the hiding of His Father's face on Calvary. It is an unfathomable pre-eminence of grief. It is a horror of great darkness which I may not pierce. His love suffers!

No love gives like Christ's love. Love is always giving. When was there human love with such wealth to bestow and willingness to communicate, as the love of Christ? In simple fact, He imparts nothing less than Himself to me! The most convicted, the most tempted, most despairing cannot have anything more sufficient. His love gives!'

The love of Christ was exercised for sinners sacrificially not only for salvation but for the glory of God. God gave and sent His only Beloved Son – Christ's sacrificial love manifested the glory of God's love! So for us to love sacrificially has to do first and foremost with

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bringing glory to God. When we grasp this truth by faith it is so helpful to the exercise of loving sacrificially.

Loving one another God's way brings blessing into our lives spiritually, for loving one another sacrificially brings forth the continuing fruit of sanctification in our lives. We do our souls good by loving God's way; we have the answer of a good conscience; we have more liberty in prayer; we honour God and bring glory to His name.

'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven' Matthew 5.16.

We evidence that we have been with Jesus and learned of Him; we evidence that we are followers of Him.

'By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another' John 13.35.

3. SERVE ONE ANOTHER BY LOVE

'If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet' John 13.14.

Here the eternal Son of God made a Man is on His knees, washing the disciples' feet. This action of perfect humility set a timeless precedent for Christians to follow.

This type of serving requires us to humble ourselves to be as a servant. Christ, as our Lord and Master, clearly teaches us that He has given us an example to follow. The Lord Jesus set the perfect example of serving because of His love and because of His humility. He has set the benchmark of serving one another as the Head of the Church. He set the example of sacrifice and He set the standard of serving.

'Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross' Philippians 2.5-8.

God gives us opportunities in our Christian life to exercise this serving ministry even in a small way. Pride hinders the exercise of humble service for the Lord. Pride says, It is really beneath me to serve another in this way. But pride injures the soul, whereas humility, like love, blesses the soul.

During World War II, England needed to increase its production of coal. Winston Churchill called together Labour leaders to enlist their support. At the end of his presentation he asked them to picture in their minds a parade which he knew would be held in Piccadilly Circus after the War. First, he said, would come the sailors who had kept the vital sea lanes open. Then would come the soldiers, who had

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come home from Dunkirk and then gone on to defeat Rommel in Africa. Then would come the pilots, who had driven the Luftwaffe from the sky.

Last of all, he said, would come a long line of sweat-stained, soot-streaked men in miner's caps. Someone would cry from the crowd, 'And where were you during the critical days of our struggle?' And from ten thousand throats would come the answer, 'We were deep in the earth with our faces to the coal.'

Not all the jobs in a church are prominent and glamorous. But it is often the people with their 'faces to the coal' who help the church accomplish its mission.

The Apostle Peter exhorts us to continually to '*be clothed with humility*' (1 Peter 5.5). Jesus the Lord taught that he who humbles himself shall be exalted. We see this exercise in its perfect, complete and fullest sense in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. After the humility of Calvary our Lord was exalted in His resurrection and ascension up to glory.

Serve by love

'For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another'
Galatians 5.13.

Here the Apostle Paul is exhorting us to serve one another as a holy antidote to the danger of worldliness. In the context of this text Paul had exhorted believers to stand in the liberty wherewith Christ made them free.

'Be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage'
Galatians 5.1.

He refers to bondage to the ceremonial law, and to the rite of circumcision. They were no longer under the condemnation of the law but were free in Christ Jesus to respect and follow it.

Serve One Another by Love

Here Paul proactively warns against abusing the Gospel liberty of salvation by grace and justification by faith. He could see the danger of the pendulum swinging from legalism to licentiousness. Elsewhere there were those who were saying, 'Let us sin that grace may abound.'

Here, inspired by the Holy Spirit, Paul teaches us one of the surest ways for our sanctification – in love serve one another – and supports this exhortation by quoting from the Ten Commandments. Serving one another:

- aids us in our personal sanctification by taking our attention off ourselves;
- if done in a spirit of love brings glory to our Saviour Who made Himself a servant;
- provides a constant source of encouragement to those who are in need.

We should serve one another in prayer, admonition, provision, fellowship, encouragement in the Word and practically.

The wisdom in this exhortation is the positive activity replacing the use of liberty as an occasion for the flesh. We live in a selfish, materialistic, consumer-, and entertainment-based society. This thinking can infiltrate into our thinking as Christians. We can drift into living according to the flesh, not the Spirit.

But in response we can notice that one of the secrets to apostolic teaching is both prohibition and provision. There is always a positive alternative given to what we must separate from, a positive alternative that is good for our spiritual wellbeing and sanctification.

Conclusion

In our first two examples of building relationships we have seen two key principles for our constant exercise: loving sacrificially and serving with humility.

In other words, how we do what we do is vital to our relationship

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one with another. The Lord taught: *'If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them'* John 13.17.

This is one of the points for us to remember. Loving one another and serving one another brings blessing for our souls.

Years ago, the *Salvation Army* was holding an international convention but its founder, General William Booth, could not attend because of physical weakness. He cabled his convention message to them. It was one word: 'OTHERS'.

4. BE KINDLY AFFECTIONED ONE TO ANOTHER / PREFERRING ONE ANOTHER

Be kindly affectioned one to another

‘Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love...’
Romans 12.10a.

Kindness is at the root of any wholesome relationship. The meaning of the word ‘kindness’ here is to be understood as that of having a kindred spirit to someone. This comes as we remember we are in the family of God, bound by eternal ties in Jesus Christ the Lord. So the Apostle Paul develops the exhortation to describe kindness as ‘brotherly love’.

When writing to the Church at Corinth he makes the same point in reverse, describing love as being kind. Inasmuch as the exercise of love, of serving one another, is to follow the example of Christ, so to exercise kindness is to demonstrate an attribute of God, and thus bring glory to His name.

In Scripture we read God’s kindness is:

a. Great kindness

The *Book of Nehemiah*, at the time of the people’s confession, recalls historically the rebellion of the Children of Israel after having been delivered from Egypt. But then the response of God is also remembered:

‘But thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and forsookest them not’
Nehemiah 9.17.

This truth is an encouragement to repentance and to turn to the Lord:

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‘And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil’ Joel 2.13.

b. Marvellous kindness

‘Blessed be the Lord: for he hath shewed me his marvellous kindness in a strong city’ Psalm 31.21.

c. Merciful kindness

‘For his merciful kindness is great toward us: and the truth of the Lord endureth for ever. Praise ye the Lord’ Psalm 117.2.

‘Let, I pray thee, thy merciful kindness be for my comfort, according to thy word unto thy servant’ Psalm 119.76.

d. Everlasting kindness

‘In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer’ Isaiah 54.8.

‘For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee’ Isaiah 54.10.

e. Christ-centred kindness

‘That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus’ Ephesians 2.7.

‘But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared...’ Titus 3.4.

Because kindness is an attribute of God, to be kind is part of being godly: to be unkind is to be ungodly. Notice how Peter makes this connection in exhorting to godliness:

Be Kind to One Another

'And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity' 2 Peter 1.7.

Notice here also how Peter, like Paul, brings out the family brotherly aspect to the exercise of kindness. It is to be kind to the brethren in the faith as though they were brethren in blood, your immediate family.

Kindness is something we have to put on and exercise ourselves in.

'Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering' Colossians 3.12.

To be kind is to try and sit where your brother or sister is sitting and understand their situation. It affects the way in which we approach our relationship, and how we assess their situation. Kindness affects our speech, our attitude to one another, and our spiritual wellbeing.

Kindness is a great opportunity for witness. An old lady stood in a long queue at the village Post Office to buy a few stamps. When at last she reached the counter, the Christian man serving her reminded her that there was a machine in the corner. She could have avoided such a long wait. 'Ah,' she replied, 'but the machine doesn't ask me about my arthritis!'

Preferring one another

'...in honour preferring one another' Romans 12.10b.

This 'preferring one another' means an eagerness to promote the wellbeing of another, an eagerness to take second place, to exhibit a type of behaviour above the normal expectation in this matter. It means to excel in showing respect to your brother or sister in the Lord as being redeemed by the Lord Jesus Christ. It also means the absence of self-promotion, the opposite to how the disciples argued as to who would be the greatest.

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'Then there arose a reasoning among them, which of them should be greatest. Luke 9.46.

'And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest' Luke 22.24.

Preferring one another means to rejoice in the promotion, usefulness, blessing and fruit of one another; there is an absence of jealousy and pride.

5. JUDGE NOT ONE ANOTHER

‘Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother’s way’ Romans 14.13.

This verse is set in the context of church members judging one another about their Christian walk. Paul reminds us that judgment belongs unto the Lord. We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. It is not helpful for us to get into this ‘judging one another’ mode, a ‘holier-than-thou’ attitude, because we do not do this or that, or have this or that in our homes; or to have a superior attitude if, in our understanding of Christian liberty, certain things are not a snare to us as they are to others. Do not despise or have contempt for others, for we have enough challenges living our own lives!

So Paul reminds us that the secret is to live unto the Lord, not unto man. We are not accountable to man but to God.

I quote from Barnes’ *Notes* extensively since he is so helpful on this issue.

“Let us not therefore judge one another any more.” Since we are to give account of ourselves at the same tribunal; since we must be there on the same level, let us not suppose that we have a right here to sit in judgment on our fellow-Christians.

“But judge this rather.” If disposed to judge, let us be employed in a better kind of judging; let us come to a determination not to injure the cause of Christ. This is an instance of the happy turn which the apostle would give to a discussion. Some men have an irresistible propensity to sit in judgment, to pronounce opinions. Let them make good use of that. It will be well to exercise it on that which can do no injury, and which may turn to good account. Instead of forming a judgment about others, let

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the man form a determination about his own conduct.

“That no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother’s way.” A stumbling-block literally means anything laid in a man’s path, over which he may fall. In the Scriptures, however, the word is used commonly in a figurative sense, to denote anything which shall cause him to sin, as sin is often represented by falling. And the passage means that we should resolve to act so as not by any means to be the occasion of leading our brethren into sin, either by our example, or by a severe and harsh judgment, provoking them to anger, or exciting jealousies, and envyings, and suspicions. No better rule than this could be given to promote peace. If every Christian, instead of judging his brethren severely, would resolve that he would so live as to promote peace, and so as not to lead others into sin, it would tend more, perhaps, than any other thing to advance the harmony and purity of the church of Christ.’

6. RECEIVE ONE ANOTHER

‘Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God’ Romans 15.7.

We have an abiding principle in the exercise of receiving one another. Once again we are called to follow the example of our Lord Jesus Christ. How did He receive us?

- As sinners – we were welcome to come and He did not turn us away or reject us, or tell us to get better first;
- As unworthy – we had nothing of ourselves to merit us to the Lord Jesus;
- As undeserving – we came totally dependent on His goodness and kindness towards us;
- Graciously – we receive forgiveness from Him freely and His righteousness freely;
- Mercifully – we did not receive the judgment we deserved but were received mercifully;
- Compassionately – we were received as helpless sinners;
- With understanding – we were received by an High Priest who has experienced suffering in His own body and soul;
- With impartially – each saved sinner is equally precious in His sight.

As we consider Him we are truly helped to develop our relationships with one another in the Church.

We noticed earlier how exercising ourselves in a biblical ‘one another’ relationship brings glory to God. Here again the Apostle Paul brings our attention to the fruit of bringing glory to God inasmuch as Christ receiving us was ultimately for the glory of God. So for us to follow Christ’s example of receiving one another will in turn also bring, in measure, glory to God.

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In this ministry of receiving one another, Paul provides for us a word of caution:

'Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations' Romans 14.1.

It concerns receiving a weaker brother into the assembly. Receive him gently, kindly, tenderly, compassionately and patiently. Do not let this believer be hindered by doubtful disputations about non-essential matters. In the context the weak believer was particularly sensitive about what constituted Christian liberty. Receive the brother not focusing on the outward but the inward growth in grace.

James also gives advice about how to receive people at the worship services.

'My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; and ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?' James 2.1-4.

Do not give priority to the rich and important while despising the poor. The general principle is, receive one another as we have been received by Christ, wisely and without partiality.

'And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him' Acts 28.30.

As a further illustration, remember how the father received his prodigal son:

'But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and

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had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him'
Luke 15.20.

The son was surprised by his father's mercy, and the elder brother was shocked by the father's grace.

7. ADMONISH ONE ANOTHER

‘And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another’ Romans 15.14.

To be able to admonish one another requires spiritual maturity, humility and grace. Before we can admonish one another we need to be aware of our own dependence upon God’s grace.

The word ‘admonish’ means to watch for someone in a caring, loving manner, concerned for their soul. This will include giving a word of correction – raising a concern you have discerned but for positive ends. It means to reprove gently with a genuine concern for the soul.

‘Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted’ Galatians 6.1.

Paul commends the believers of the Church at Rome because they were able to exercise this ministry. The members cared for one another’s souls; they did much of the pastoral work among themselves.

Again like the other ‘one another’ exhortations, the exercise of this ministry is to be in love. Never set out to admonish a brother or sister in anger or in a judging spirit. Only do so in love for their good.

When we admonish one another, the first reaction may be hurtful and one of rejection. However, if that admonition is justified and correct, a true believer will, in time, be thankful to the Lord for it.

This is an illustration of what I mean. The head of a college called in a student who came from a well-known Christian family. However, he was living off the reputation of the college rather than on his own commitment. The head told the young man, ‘You have ten cylinders but you are only firing on three of them.’ At first the student was very upset, but then he thought about it and realised the admonition

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was correct. He buckled down to his work and eventually, in God's goodness, became a very respected army chaplain.

We are given a beautiful picture of gracious, positive admonition and support in the ministry of Apollos. Aquila and Priscilla heard the young man preach and recognised a weakness in his ministry.

'And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly' Acts 18.26.

Instead of criticising him to others around, they took Apollos aside and explained the Word more accurately. In the same way we are to admonish one another in a way that will, in the long term, give our brother or sister cause to thank the Lord for that kind intervention.

8. BE LIKEMINDED TOWARDS ONE ANOTHER

Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus' Romans 15.5.

What is the secret of the Church being likeminded towards one another? The secret lies in what is at the heart of the unity: 'having the same thing to mind', or 'to unite around'.

The Apostle Paul, in writing to the Church at Ephesus, reminds them of this vital point.

'There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all' Ephesians 4.4-6.

In this text we are directed to the fundamental reasons and basis of our unity and likemindedness:

- One Church;
- One Holy Spirit;
- One hope centred in God's Word;
- One Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ;
- One baptism;
- One God and Father of all;
- One authority.

Our likemindedness must have a foundation for it to be wholesome and not simply dependent on emotion. In the Old Testament it was promised that the Gospel of Jesus Christ would be at the heart of Christian unity.

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'And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them'
Jeremiah 32.39.

This immediately became evident in the formation of the New Testament Church:

'And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common'
Acts 4.32.

We have here the evidence of spiritual unity around a common Gospel-centred belief.

Now it is evident that in the early Church the exercise of being like-minded was one of their great challenges. The Apostle Paul in writing to the Church at Corinth wrote in a spirit of humility, pleading with the church:

'Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment' 1 Corinthians 1.10.

Again in *Philippians* 4.2 he implores Euodias and Syntyche to be *'of the same mind in the Lord.'*

The Apostle Peter also emphatically exhorts all to this exercise of having the same mind:

'Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous' 1 Peter 3.8.

On one occasion the Apostle Paul links this likemindedness to actually bringing to him personal joy of heart.

'Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind' *Philippians* 2.2.

Be Likeminded Towards One Another

In conclusion, we can note that likemindedness and its witness is conduct worthy of the Gospel.

'Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel' Philippians 1.27.

9. SALUTE ONE ANOTHER

'Salute one another with an holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you' Romans 16.16.

There are two words translated from the same Greek word to teach appropriate opening communication. The first word we have is 'salute' and the second is 'greet'.

'All the brethren greet you. Greet ye one another with an holy kiss' 1 Corinthians 16.20.

'Greet one another with an holy kiss' 2 Corinthians 13.12.

The essence of the word in the original means to greet wholeheartedly, respectfully and sincerely. It can mean to embrace, but so doing with the purpose of greeting or welcoming in a wholesome manner.

But what is meant here by '*an holy kiss*'? The word 'holy' helps us to understand it is a greeting devoid of lust, devoid of sensuality. It would be, at that time in public, a kiss on both the cheeks, not on the lips. It is an expression of heartfelt affection as being in the family of God.

Now in Jewish culture the kiss would only be publicly between a man and a man, or woman and woman. It seems that the expression was continued into the Church, but always with the proviso of being a holy kiss, and therefore sincere. This practice, like that of foot washing, can be expressed in different ways according to culture.

If, for example, kissing in public is offensive in a certain culture then it can be expressed in a different manner. On the news recently a lady living in another nation was arrested for kissing a man in public. In some countries to embrace is more polite than to kiss, and then only between the same sexes publicly. In other countries, like ours, the handshake still remains the most common form of polite greeting.

The point of this teaching is that it is important to take our greetings

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seriously as believers, and to do so in a wholehearted and culturally sensitive manner so as to be above reproach. It is to do so in a spirit of Christian charity, and to be impartial in our greetings to all believers.

'Greet ye one another with a kiss of charity' 1 Peter 5.14.

'Salute every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren which are with me greet you' Philippians 4.21.

'Greet all the brethren with an holy kiss' 1Thessalonians 5.26.

This greeting is not only to be activated between believers but also between the local churches. In this way, of course, the greeting will be either by verbal message or in writing. This reminds us of the need to take seriously our manner of communication between churches. It is by way of respectful, heartfelt, loving salutation, remembering our unity in Christ Jesus.

10. BE NOT CONSUMED OF ONE ANOTHER

'But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another' Galatians 5.15.

This exhortation comes directly after the call to serve one another in love. As we serve one another in love we are, in effect, building up one another in love. Whereas if we bite and devour one another, we in effect end up consuming one another.

The warning is given here against the members of the Church in Galatia living according to the old nature, for a house divided against itself will fall.

'Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and a house divided against a house falleth' Luke 11.17.

To 'bite and devour' here in our text means an expression of partisan hatred being exerted for mutual injury. It is a manner of expression that is intended to cause harm and does so right at the heart of the Fellowship. God removes His divine candlestick from a church which continues in such a manner without repentance, so the Apostle Paul warns us to take heed, to watch our spirit and our motives in communication. It is a battle of the mind, carnal against spiritual.

'For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?' 1 Corinthians 3.3.

'But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy' James 3.17.

11. DO NOT PROVOKE OR ENVY ONE ANOTHER

'Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another' Galatians 5.26.

Here we see the battle between haughtiness and humility, and between vanity and lowliness. In this verse the Apostle Paul is warning against a bragging type of conversation that promotes self and provokes another to reply in like vein. Hendrikson says, 'God does not approve of windbags.'

It is of the same ilk as 'pub talk' where men share stories of exaggerated deeds and accomplishments. One person's story provokes another person to reply in like vein to impress. For a Christian this is to talk in a manner that provokes unspiritual conversation, to irritate to evil. It is to communicate in a manner which stirs up the old nature of another rather than minister to the new.

Vanity, an aspect of pride, is one of the greatest evils of this present world. It is to be proud when we have nothing to be proud of. Entertainment and social media mitigate against the command for the Christian to walk in humility. It is to have a vain conceit of possessing a rightful claim to honour. It is to promote oneself for self-gratification. It is the opposite of seeking the honour and glory of God.

The old nature will readily warm to the problem of vanity, but our daily exercise is to put it off, lay it aside.

'If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit' Galatians 5.25.

Remember our perfect example:

'He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street' Isaiah 42.2.

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'Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass' Zechariah 9.9.

'Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls' Matthew 11.29.

'After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded' John 13.5.

'Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, who in presence am base among you, but being absent am bold toward you' 2 Corinthians 10.1.

Paul having warned against the problem of provocation, now warns about the inner thoughts of envy, also being an inner evil fruit of vanity and pride.

The best warning against envy is to consider how it motivated the persecution of Christ.

'For he knew that for envy they had delivered him' Matthew 27.18.

Envy corrupts our spiritual lives.

'A sound heart is the life of the flesh: but envy the rottenness of the bones' Proverbs 14.30.

Envy is like an unstoppable tidal wave.

'Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before envy?' Proverbs 27.4.

Once again we can see it is the influence of the old nature against the new.

'Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?' James 4.5.

12. BEAR YE ONE ANOTHER'S BURDENS

*'Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ'
Galatians 6.2.*

The context of the text refers here to the burden of besetting sin and temptation in a person's life. It means to support the brother or sister in their battle against the flesh; to support them in prayer, by admonition, by hospitality, and by encouragement in the Word. Of course, the meaning can extend to the support of those in trial and tribulation and sickness.

What can we do to bear some of the load so as to assist the brother or sister in their walk with the Lord? This is an exercise of the mind to be alert and aware and willing to support one another. By so doing we are fulfilling the law of Christ, the law of love. Love has to be at the heart of all our service for the Lord. Supporting one another is one of the most telling ways of following Christ Who lived His life totally on behalf of others, not to be served but to serve.

The example of the four friends bringing their friend to Jesus shows us the way.

'And again he entered into Capernaum after some days; and it was noised that he was in the house. And straightway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door: and he preached the word unto them. And they come unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four. And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay' Mark 2.1-4.

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The friends were:

- willing to help in the first place;
- willing to give of their time;
- willing to take action;
- willing to overcome obstacles;
- willing to do something unusual for the Lord;
- willing to work together as a team.

They had a determination to be Christ-centred.

13. FORBEARING ONE ANOTHER

‘With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love’ Ephesians 4.2.

When we consider the many ‘one another’ relationship exhortations in Scripture we can feel overwhelmed. We feel unworthy and often have to confess difficulties in exercising these wise exhortations. But truly understood, these exhortations can only be in real exercise as an outworking of the new nature. When we try to follow them though our own efforts, our own wisdom, our own strength, we often stumble.

These exhortations are an exercise of the mind, heart and will as they are under the influence of the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit is influencing and enabling the new nature, we will be following the example of Christ. He was lowly and meek and exercised, in a perfect manner, longsuffering and forbearance.

We need to pray for a Christ-like spirit, for this will positively govern the way we behave towards one another.

Three exercises are mentioned here that will help us in the ministry of forbearance in love.

a. Lowliness

This has the meaning of humility. This word only came into usage in a positive sense in the context of Christianity. This virtue is based on a correct estimate of our own littleness and with an understanding of our sinfulness. But we may ask the question, How then does this lowliness apply to Christ, Who is meek and lowly in heart?

When applied to the perfect human nature of Christ it speaks of His dependence as a Man upon God. It speaks of His willingness to take upon Himself a body and become a dependent human being, in the same way as the angels are lowly, inasmuch as they are always dependent upon God as His creation.

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Lowliness in a born-again Christian is a fruit of understanding our sinful heart and utter dependence upon God. Lowliness in a Christian is a desire to follow the example of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in humility.

b. Meekness

Here ‘meekness’ has the meaning of self-control under the influence of the new nature. While the pagans advocated self-assertion, the Christian way taught self-abasement. It is a quiet spirit towards God, submitting to His will in our lives, believing Him to be both good and wise.

As it relates to our relationship with others, it accepts insults, opposition, or provocation as sanctifying to us; in other words, God has permitted them to come to us. He will turn what Satan means for evil to our soul’s good. The hurt and the pain ultimately work for our good under the sanctifying wisdom of God.

‘For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God’ 1 Peter 2.20.

‘But and if ye suffer for righteousness’ sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled’ 1 Peter 3.14.

‘For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing’ 1 Peter 3.17.

‘For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds’ Hebrews 12.3.

c. Longsuffering

This is part of having a God-given Christian courage. It is described as the brave patience with which the Christian deals with trials, temptation, prevarication, opposition and slander.

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The root of the word has to do with a patience that quells the emotion motivating a natural retaliation in anger. Hendrikson says:

‘In view of the fact that God has been so longsuffering toward me, even though in His holy eyes my sins must stand out far more clearly than do my brother’s blemishes in my eyes, I must surely be patient with my brother.’

Whereas the natural man sees strength in anger and retaliation, the Christian understands ‘strength’ as the God-given ability to restrain the old nature and live by the new. The exercise of longsuffering is for the glory of God and for the sanctification of ourselves.

Forbearing one another in love

Notice how Paul leads us up to this forbearance in love – it is like a spiritual training course. Forbearance is to bear up under provocation, to bear up in a spirit of meek gentleness. It is to forbear one another in the exercise of love characterised by lowliness, meekness and longsuffering. It is to understand that in exercising such a spirit we are actually doing good to our souls!

We are a spiritual garden in which Christ is pleased to walk, and support and encourage us through His Word. We are exhorted to this ‘one another’ theology of relationships for our own good as well as that of others.

To have the answer of a good conscience in our dealings is to enjoy peace in the heart. Satan wants us to retaliate, promising satisfaction and the exercise of our rights. The satisfaction of retaliation and revenge is shortlived for the Christian, and loads us with a greater burden.

Remember God is permitting this situation in your life and will overturn it for your spiritual good if you forbear. Matthew Henry states:

‘Forbearing one another in love signifies bearing their infirmities out of a principle of love, and so as not to cease to love them

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on the account of these. The best Christians have need to bear one with another, and to make the best one of another, to provoke one another's graces and not their passions.'

Let us remember we worship a God who is constantly showing forbearance to us. Note Paul's use of the word 'endeavouring' in the next verse, meaning 'make haste to', or 'be diligent to'.

14. BE KIND TO ONE ANOTHER

'...and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you' Ephesians 4.32.

Here Paul calls us to positive virtues in direct contrast to those arising from an evil disposition. It is clear from the teaching of the Apostle elsewhere that these are exercises we need to put on; we cannot rely on these virtues being exercised naturally.

'Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye' Colossians 3.12-13.

The kindness here has at its heart compassionate understanding of a person's situation. Christian kindness is a Spirit-imparted goodness of the heart and is the opposite of malice. Kindness was one of the great testimonies of the apostles.

'...by pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned...' 2 Corinthians 6.6.

We are told by Christ to be like our Heavenly Father Who is kind:

'But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil' Luke 6.35.

Kindness is to turn a deaf ear to gossip. It is, when the faults of others are evident, to also remember their good qualities. It is linked here with being tenderhearted, having a heart of compassion, and forgiving one another – our next subject.

15. FORGIVING ONE ANOTHER

‘...forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye’ Colossians 3.13.

God’s forgiveness of our sin places an obligation upon us to forgive others. One of the fruits of a saved and forgiven person is demonstrated in their forgiving of others.

Forgiving others is not easy, clearly demonstrated by the unfathomable number of Jews killed under Nazi rule – six million. But the Holocaust is not confined to history. Seventy years later, the impact of this evil is still being felt. What about those who lost loved ones in the ‘final solution’? How have they handled the inevitable hatred and anguish?

‘Forgiving Hitler’ is the true story of one such person, Kathy Diosy. It is intense and personal, showing that even the darkest evil is not insurmountable. A greater power is at work in the world.

Born in Hungary in 1920, Kathy Diosy grew up amid the cancerous spread of fascism, which eventually led to World War II. The book begins with her first contact with Nazism at her Vienna boarding school, and continues right through to her escape from post-war Hungary as a refugee to Australia.

While ‘Forgiving Hitler’ recounts Kathy’s physical fight for survival, its main focus is on the emotional and spiritual aspects of her life. It’s a path that touches almost every emotion imaginable, as she journeys through depths of despair and bitterness, to the joy of finding peace with God.

The story is not presented as a ‘triumph of the human spirit’. In fact, the hatred that threatens to overcome Kathy is key to the narrative. Rather, God is the main protagonist. It is God who saves her – not

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only forgiving her sins, but saving her from the awful power of resentment and vengefulness that threatened to enslave her.

One of the greatest obstacles to church fellowship and growth is a spirit of bitterness and refusal to forgive. Our profession of faith is a sham if we stubbornly refuse to forgive those who have wronged us. If the Holy Spirit of God is working in our lives then forgiveness of others will evidence itself. If we have been forgiven by God it will influence and impact upon our lives.

One of the effects is gratitude to God which evidences itself in a forgiving spirit. These Scriptures help us here:

'Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.

'Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done.

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Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses' Matthew 18.21-35.

'And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you' Ephesians 4.30-32.

Corrie ten Boom told of not being able to forget a wrong that had been done to her. She had forgiven the person, but she kept 'rehashing' the incident and so could not sleep.

'Finally Corrie cried out to God for help in putting the problem to rest. "His help came in the form of a kindly Lutheran pastor," Corrie wrote, "to whom I confessed my failure after two sleepless weeks." "Up in the church tower," he said, nodding out the window, "is a bell which is rung by pulling on a rope. But you know what? After the sexton lets go of the rope, the bell keeps on swinging. First ding, then dong. Slower and slower until there's a final dong and it stops. I believe the same thing is true of forgiveness. When we forgive, we take our hand off the rope. But if we've been tugging at our grievances for a long time, we mustn't be surprised if the old angry thoughts keep coming for a while. They're just the ding-dongs of the old bell slowing down." And so it proved to be. There were a few more midnight reverberations, a couple of dings when the subject came up in my conversations,

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but the force – which was my willingness in the matter – had gone out of them. They came less and less often and at the last stopped altogether: we can trust God not only above our emotions, but also above our thoughts.’

The Word of God can be intensely challenging at times. Forgiveness can be described as being like two sides of one coin: God forgiving us and us forgiving others. Forgiven and forgiving are the hallmarks of a true Christian. We are saved by God’s grace, but amazing grace brings its responsibilities. It is like faith and works. James says, Let us see your faith by your works.

16. TEACHING AND ADMONISHING ONE ANOTHER

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord'
Colossians 3.16.

The first principle we can see here is to immerse ourselves in the Word of Christ. The Word of Christ refers here to all Scripture, emphasising how all Scripture has its reference point in Christ. In other words, to understand Scripture is to respect its Christ-centred nature.

'Let the Word of Christ dwell in you' means giving time to seriously consider the Word and meditating upon it; it means in our devotion time to respect the role of Scripture in moulding our doctrine, thinking and lifestyle. Only inasmuch as we seriously engage with the Word of God, submitting to its authority, can we teach others. We considered this subject in Chapter 8 'Admonish One Another', so will not repeat those thoughts.

In our text here, admonition is associated with teaching. Teaching one another in this verse is not in the context of preaching but in the context of fellowship. It could be in a small group Bible Study, Men's or Ladies' Meeting, Fellowship Breakfast, or one-to-one. It is to share what we have learned through the Scripture for the mutual benefit of others.

Just a word in passing about the remainder of the verse. It seems the fellowship together included the singing of psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. The most natural sense of this verse is psalms, Word-based hymns and short scriptural songs, or odes.

But notice here also how we are called to sing with grace in our hearts. This means to sing seriously, engaging our mind to the words, to sing in a gracious, thoughtful manner.

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For example, when the words are praise we lift up our voices; when the words are confession we sing softer. Singing with grace in our hearts is to sing in a manner whereby others are helped not hindered in their worship, not to bring attention to ourselves by way of distracting others. It is said you should be able to hear the person singing next to you: otherwise you are singing too loudly.

Another translation of singing '*with grace in your heart*' is 'to sing with melody in your hearts.' This means to sing harmoniously. If we are not gifted with a melodious voice, then it is wise to ensure our volume is not damaging the melody.

This care taken in singing to ensure spiritual enjoyment in worship is all part of our serving one another. In any event, if we take seriously the exhortation to sing with grace, or to sing graciously, there will be harmony, for we are taught here that we are singing to the Lord, and to sing to the Lord requires reverence and respect.

17. COMFORT ONE ANOTHER

*‘Wherefore comfort one another with these words’
1 Thessalonians 4.18.*

This ‘one another’ exhortation is given in the context of bereavement. A loved one has passed away and, as a believer, is asleep with Jesus, meaning he or she is at perfect peace with Jesus.

Here Paul is encouraging us in the way in which we should comfort one another with the outcome of salvation: be wise and understand there is hope. The death and resurrection of Jesus is our assurance. This truth is the sign that those who are now at rest with Jesus will come with Him at His Second Coming.

There will be a glorious gathering together of all saved people, coming from Heaven and those alive on Earth. The Lord Himself will descend from Heaven with a shout, reverberating throughout the Earth. The trumpet of God shall sound with a glorious harmonious note; the dead in Christ will be raised and united with their souls in a glorified body; the saints on Earth will be given glorified bodies and caught up to join them in the clouds as one Church. There will be a most wonderful meeting time with the Lord – there shall we see His face, for ever to be with the Lord, never to be parted from His wonderful presence.

Later, in *1 Thessalonians 5.11*, the Apostle Paul exhorts us to comfort each other for mutual edification with the assurance of these truths.

*‘Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another,
even as also ye do.’*

In bereavement, in trial, in sickness, in persecution, in necessity, in disappointment – comfort yourselves. In our gatherings of worship and fellowship together, and in the funeral service of a departed

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believer, here is true comfort. The Lord Jesus led the way not only in weeping with those that wept, but in providing sure words of comfort.

'Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also' John 14.1-3.

The Apostle Paul provides a very helpful guide in this essential requirement of comfort in *Romans 1.12*, where he states that our mutual common faith provides the basis for the mutual comfort of believers.

'...that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.'

Jesus Himself, when promising the Holy Spirit, said He would not leave us comfortless but send the Holy Spirit. So we find comfort as the Holy Spirit leads us into the truth as it is in Jesus, and we share with one another. When we comfort one another we reflect the character of God, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort.

We are especially called to comfort the feebleminded with the assuring promises of the Word of God:

'Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men' 1 Thessalonians 5.14.

Just one example is:

'Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him' Psalm 103.13.

18. EDIFY ONE ANOTHER

'Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do' 1 Thessalonians 5.11.

The word 'edify' here has the meaning of building one another up spiritually in the promises of God, particularly with respect to the blessed outcome of salvation.

'For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ' 1 Thessalonians 5.9.

Our Lord Jesus Christ died for us that we should live together with Him in fellowship by the Spirit and the Word, here in time and in His very presence in Heaven for eternity.

This word 'edify' is very significant to the meaningful fellowship of the Church. So often Satan tempts us to pull one another down, to criticise, to discourage, to burden one another, but this word 'edify' is totally opposite to this. It means to build one another up in the faith, to converse in a manner that helps rather than hinders one another.

'Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers' Ephesians 4.29.

It means to follow after that which builds up and encourages in peace:

'Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another' Romans 14.19.

It is an exercise of pleasing not ourselves but our neighbour:

'Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification' Romans 15.2.

We find love is a key to this ministry of edification:

'Now as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we

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all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth' 1 Corinthians 8.1.

It is to be a key element in our worship services:

'How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying' 1 Corinthians 14.26.

'For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ' Ephesians 4.12.

19. EXHORT ONE ANOTHER

'But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin' Hebrews 3.13.

This chapter in *Hebrews* commences with a call to the Lord's people to consider Christ Jesus. Consider His faithfulness and His authority as the divine builder of the Church; hold fast your confidence in Him; rejoice in the hope of Christ; hear Him; harden not your hearts; take heed lest unbelief prevail, and you depart from God.

The deceitfulness, the trick, of sin here is the gradual hardening of the heart that leads to a spirit of unbelief. The word 'exhort' here has to do with us encouraging one another in the Lord as a resistance to unbelief. So we are given two fundamental reasons why we should exhort one another daily: to constantly consider Jesus Christ; and to take heed of the danger of unbelief. It is God's means of resisting the deceitfulness of sin that leads us away from Him.

We see a living example of this in the ministry of God's servant Barnabas. The Church at Jerusalem had heard about the work of the Lord at Antioch and sent Barnabas to verify it. When Barnabas witnessed for himself the grace of God at work in the Church at Antioch, he exhorted them to cleave unto the Lord with purpose of heart.

'Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord' Acts 11.23.

We can also note the spirit in which the apostle Paul exercised this ministry of exhortation:

'As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children' 1 Thessalonians 2.11.

From this reference we can notice the important element of comfort included in this ministry of exhortation. But notice here also the

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regularity of this ministry of exhortation, primarily in the Word, directing to Christ. Here is a daily, positive purpose for texting, using Facebook and Twitter, sending emails or making 'phone calls.

Notice here as well the word 'today', meaning the day of grace, the day of salvation, the Gospel age.

This ministry of exhortation is referred to several times in the New Testament letters. It is obviously a key element of the Christian ministry and walk and of our serving one another.

In his sermon on the day of Pentecost Peter, in the power of the Holy Spirit, encouraged to salvation:

'And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation' Acts 2.40.

Again we can see this encouraging exhortation in the ministry of Paul and Barnabas:

'Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God' Acts 14.22.

Paul, writing to the Church at Thessalonica, includes the element of warning in addition to comfort in exhortation:

'Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men' 1 Thessalonians 5.14.

This ministry of exhortation is such a helpful means of support to Christians struggling under stress and pain. It is a ministry that can be undertaken by Christians who are no longer physically able to serve in the Church. They can have a ministry of encouraging biblical exhortation to support those on the front line. This can be a regular ministry which will be a blessing to them and to those with whom they are communicating.

20. CONSIDER ONE ANOTHER

‘...and let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works’ Hebrews 10.24.

Matthew Henry summarises the teaching of this verse in a very helpful manner:

‘That we should consider one another, to provoke to love and to good works. Christians ought to have a tender consideration and concern for one another; they should affectionately consider what their several wants, weaknesses, and temptations are; and they should do this, not to reproach one another, to provoke one another not to anger, but to love and good works, calling upon themselves and one another to love God and Christ more, to love duty and holiness more, to love their brethren in Christ more, and to do all the good offices of Christian affection both to the bodies and the souls of each other. A good example given to others is the best and most effectual provocation to love and good works.’

In the ministry of considering one another to provoke to love and good works, we are to understand people. We must consider their situation, their weaknesses, their trials, their concerns, and their needs. This is not to judge or be critical but to do all we can to provoke one another positively to love and serve.

Notice here the positive use of the word ‘provoke’. Sadly we often provoke people to sinful thoughts and reactions, but here, with sincere honest consideration of where a person is, we are to encourage them on in the right way.

Notice here the important ministry of the members of the local church. They care by considering one another, to understand where a person is, to be concerned for each other’s spiritual welfare. The positive outcome of this considering is to encourage, or to provoke to,

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love and good works. Instead of stirring up a spirit of resentment or criticism, we stir up one another's religious affections. This exhortation reminds us of our duty to consider properly a person's situation, and then to set out to help them.

Note how we are called in *Hebrews 12.1-3* to consider Christ as an antidote to weariness in the mind:

'Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.'

A serious consideration of the sufferings of Christ will bring forth the positive fruit of Christian perseverance.

21. HAVE COMPASSION FOR ONE ANOTHER

‘Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing; but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing’ 1 Peter 3.8-9.

We are given several helpful guidelines as to how to be ‘*all of one mind*’. Compassion is placed at the beginning because, like ‘consider one another’ in the previous chapter, it affects the way we relate to one another. Probably the greatest hindrance to church fellowship is the failure to communicate with consideration or compassion.

To ‘have compassion’ here means to identify where people are and empathise with them in a gracious manner. Compassion today is limited to sympathy in suffering and loss, but it also means understanding of all walks of life. In the original the word ‘compassion’ did not only relate to people who are suffering; it also meant to have compassion for people who are being prospered.

A person being prospered can be under work pressure and have particular temptations to pride and materialism. A person suffering adversity can be tempted to resentment, self-pity and bitterness of spirit.

Compassion means to understand and empathise with your brother and sister as being united to you in Christ. It will help you to love them with understanding and sincerity. It will help you to be pitiful, meaning to be heartfelt in your love.

This same word is translated in *Ephesians* 4.32 as being tenderhearted. Compassion will help us to approach one another graciously and with humility in a courteous manner. It means we will understand the

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importance of greeting one another graciously. It means we will have the humility not to retaliate to unkindness with the same, but rather to show a better way, understanding the weak spiritual state of the person who is attacking.

'A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger' Proverbs 15.1.

'Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you' Luke 6.28.

When we receive a difficult communication our natural inclination is to respond in a similar, defensive manner, but we are called to stop – consider and be compassionate, and answer in a blessed manner, reflecting Christ.

22. CONCLUSION

We have considered a number of ‘one another’ exhortations that give guidance to Christian relationships. The secret in the Christian walk is to constantly keep Christ in view in what we do and what we say.

William Gadsby (1773-1844) sums this truth up beautifully in the following verses:

*Ye souls, redeemed with blood,
And called by grace divine,
Walk worthy of your God,
And let your conduct shine;
Keep Christ, your living Head, in view,
In all you say, in all you do.*

*Has Jesus made you free?
Then you are free indeed;
Ye sons of liberty,
Ye chosen royal seed,
Walk worthy of your Lord, and view
Your glorious Head, in all you do.*

*Shall sons of heavenly birth
Their dignity debase?
Unite with sons of earth,
And take a servant's place?
The slaves to sin and Satan too?
Forget to keep their Lord in view?*

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*Forbid it, mighty God!
Preserve us in thy fear;
Uphold with staff and rod,
And guard from every snare;
Teach us to walk with Christ in view,
And honour him in all we do.*

*Increase our faith and love,
And make us watch and pray;
O fix our souls above,
Nor let us ever stray;
Dear Lord, do thou our strength renew,
And lead us on with Christ in view.*