

The One Anothers (Part 1)
Selected Scriptures
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For those of you who are visiting with us this morning, let me tell you that we have for a number of months found ourselves in a wonderful study of James' letter to the 12 tribes scattered abroad, but this morning we are going to begin just a brief series. Probably just two or three messages, that's my goal anyway; although don't stick my integrity on that, if you would. It may it may go a little longer but I don't anticipate that. We're going to step back from James and look at our responsibility to each other. On Sunday nights, we've been studying the church and as we've studied that I've been more and more aware of our response and responsibility to each other. This is certainly not commonly felt or reflected in the culture in which we live.

This week I read a story that only warranted a small little box of text buried somewhere in the back of a local paper. Last month, on Friday August 11th, a 49-year-old man was found dead in his home. Now there's nothing, in and of itself, special or unusual about that; it happens all the time. John Michael Smith lived alone at his home and so it's not surprising that he was found alone, dead at his home. What is surprising and, in fact, shocking is that police came to the conclusion that he could have been dead for weeks, perhaps even months. Neighbors, when asked, said they thought he had moved to live with family or friends. But they admitted that they really knew very little of this man. John Michael Smith was described as a very private man who kept very much to himself. You say, well what about his family? Well, Mr. Smith's family were said to have made several attempts to get in touch with him over a couple of months, were concerned about the lack of contact and they are the ones that eventually contacted the local police station. It's really remarkable isn't it? A 49-year-old man dead for weeks or months without anyone knowing; how could that happen?

As I thought about that story it occurred to me really that is a microcosm of where the culture in which we live is. Sadly, our culture encourages that kind of isolation. Some of you have read some of the writings of Allan Bloom a sort of cultural commentator on our times. He wrote for example, *The Closing of the American Mind*. Allan Bloom writes this, "Isolation, a sense of lack of profound contact with other human beings seems to be the disease of our times. We are lonely while living in society with all the social needs for others yet unable to satisfy them."

You can see this problem, this encouragement to isolation in many different ways in the culture. Consider, for example, even the architecture of our homes. When you pull through some small rural towns, you see lots of old homes with porches. Sheila and I were struck with that as we were driving back even the last time we went to Mobile, driving through some small Alabama towns, and people are out sitting on their porches. Now that can also be a little frightening and

disconcerting as well, but they're out visiting and enjoying each other and they're they'll visit with anybody who happens to come by; there's a connection. We, on the other hand, pull straight into our garages and walk into our homes. Sheila and I have often talked that we have to work to build any sort of rapport or friendship with our neighbors who live on our cul-de-sac because we all drive into our garages and walk into our houses. We live in isolation very easily.

Take technology, for example, there are cell phones which are supposedly supposed to bring us closer together. But, in reality, they tend to isolate us from everyone but our own little tight circle. In fact, I read an article recently about some college students. This is becoming an increasing problem for students who go off to college. They take their cell phones with them and they will use those cell phones to stay in contact with family, which is a good thing, I'm not criticizing that, parents, and with all their old high school friends and so they can be in the middle of a huge campus crowded with people and not connect with a single one of them.

There's television. I cannot believe it but it's constantly asserted so I'm assuming it's true that the average American watches a mind-numbing six hours of television a day. And then there are hundreds of movies and videos. Folks, I hate to tell you this, but it is hard, in fact, it is impossible to build relationships with other people when you're both silent watching a movie. You can sit next to each other but you can't build a relationship.

There's the internet. A growing number of articles that describe the isolation from real relationships that the internet tends to produce, even among a husband and a wife. A husband can spend hours reading and responding to his favorite blogs and ignore the people in his own household. And sadly, it gives the illusion of relationship but without any of the reality. Such isolation as is so common in our culture runs contrary to the spirit of the New Testament and it's in direct opposition to the New Testament view of life in the church.

Recently we've been studying on Sunday nights the various images that the New Testament uses to describe and define the church. Images like a family, a flock, and Paul's favorite, a body. All of those images picture an interdependence and relationship that, unfortunately, is foreign to many Christians. When you think about those pictures of the church, it shouldn't surprise us that the New Testament has so much to say about our responsibility to each other. The Lord wants us to understand that we have a responsibility to the people around us. Look around you this morning. Before God you have a responsibility to these people. Why is that? Why is relationship so important?

Well, they're many reasons. But, personally, I think the most compelling reason is that relationship, listen carefully, relationship is a part of the residual image of God in us. Think about it for a moment. There has existed within our God, within the Trinity relationship, for all eternity, and there always will exist relationship; and so there's a sense in which we can say that

to fail to properly relate to one another is to sin against the very character of our God. To imagine that we can live as an island, that we can live in isolation from others is to sin against our Creator and how He made us and as a reflection of Himself. In fact, I would go as far as to say that to shirk that responsibility, to isolate ourselves is part of the essence of sin.

You see this attitude raise its head very shortly after sin entered the world. You remember that after creation, Adam and Eve enjoyed perfect relationship with each other. They were absolutely connected at the most intimate level, there was no strife, there was no conflict because both of them were completely perfect. And they had perfect relationship with God. You remember, they walked with the Second Person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ Himself in the garden in the cool of the day. There was a spirit between Adam and Eve of interdependence. But then they sinned and they plunged the entire human race into sin with them and what happens? What's the first thing that happens? They hide themselves from God and then they start blaming each other for the situation in which they find themselves. And then in chapter four the situation gets even worse because they have Cain and Cain, their oldest, ends up killing their youngest.

Perhaps the most telling and insightful comment into human personality and character Cain makes in Genesis 4:9, you remember God comes to Cain and He says, "Where is Abel your brother?" You remember Cain's response? Cain said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" You know I think there is, in that statement of Cain's, there is a perfect description of human depravity. That statement speaks volumes about what was really going on in Cain's heart. There is in it, obviously, a disrespect for God. There's also a bald face lie: "I do not know." Of course he knew. But at its essence, there is also in that statement, "am I my brother's keeper" a declaration of independence: I am only responsible for me and nobody else.

By the way, the New Testament's answer to Cain's question, "am I my brother's keeper?" The New Testament answers, "Absolutely you are." And, folks, that's true of each of us as well. As I said, look around you. You are your brother's keeper. You are responsible. We are all responsible to each other. In fact, there's an entire genre of New Testament commands that we commonly call the "one anothers." And that's because the apostles are constantly outlining our responsibility to each other, to other Christians. And they do so by commanding us to be or to do something to one another. In the New Testament there are about 50 such commands.

Most commonly, there is an imperative; a command followed by the words "one another." But it also takes other forms. Now among the 50 or so commands, there is a large amount of repetition; so the 50 can be placed into a manageable number of categories or groups. I hope to spend the next two or three weeks examining a number of those categories that describe our responsibilities to each other. We won't look at every one. I hope, though, to incite you to study them on your own, either in your own personal study or with your family. But I want to devote,

this morning, to just one category. As I said, I won't do this with all of them. In fact, we'll take a sweeping look at some of them over the next couple of weeks.

But this morning, I want to devote our time to just one category of the description of our responsibility to each and that's because this particular category overshadows all others in its intensity, in its priority, and even in the frequency with which it occurs. It is the constantly recurring command to love one another. Now, in the time that we have this morning, I want us to examine briefly three features of this command to love one another. Let me give you a road map of where we're going. First of all, we'll look at the primacy or priority of loving one another, secondly, the point of loving one another and thirdly, the path to loving one another.

So let's look at those features together. The first feature, the primacy or priority of loving one another. I don't think we really grasp how important this command really is, because this virtue too runs contrary to the spirit of our society. I'm reminded of the words of Alexis de Tocqueville who wrote, "In democratic societies each citizen is habitually busy with the contemplation of a very petty object, which is himself." You know, I think because it's inherent to our sinfulness and it is inherent to the culture in which we live; we could easily lose a sense of just how weighty this command really is to God, the command to love one another. But there are a number of ways in the New Testament that it's made clear to us just how important it really is to God. Let me give them to you briefly.

Number one. We understand the primacy of loving one another because it's the most frequent command in the New Testament in regards to one another. If you were to count, as I had opportunity to do this week, all of those times in the New Testament when we are told to love one another, sometimes with the words "one another," other times the spirit of that, you would discover that more than 50 times are we commanded to love other people. By the sheer volume, we should understand just how important this is to the spirit of God. This was not some passing thought He had, instead it was at the core and heart of the commands that are given to us.

Number two. We understand the priority or primacy of loving one another by being told that it is the second greatest command in all of Scripture, it's the second greatest commandment. You see, God has helped set our priorities, turn with me this morning to Matthew 22. A familiar passage, it's Tuesday of the Passion Week, Jesus has basically set up camp, as it were, on the temple grounds taking all the questions that come and answering them, dealing with the issues. In just a couple of days, He's going to draw away privately and spend the rest of the time with His disciples. But in Matthew 22:15, we're told that: "the Pharisees went and plotted together how they might trap Him in what He said. They sent their disciples to Him, along with the Herodians, saying..." And then they pour out these questions, verse 22, they went away with their tails between their legs because Jesus so powerfully answered their questions. So verse 23: "On that day some Sadducees (who say there is no resurrection) came to Jesus and questioned

Him.” And they come asking questions in an effort to trip Him up. They also are unsuccessful, so, in verse 34: “when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they...” take another shot, they gather themselves together, “One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him.” So this is an antagonistic question, an antagonistic crowd. And notice what they ask, “Teacher” verse 36, “which is the great commandment in the Law?”

Now to really appreciate that question, you have to understand a little bit about the culture of the times. The Pharisees asking this question believed there were 613 commands in the Old Testament; one for each letter of the 10 Hebrew letter of the Ten Commandments. And so there was a lot of debate and argument among these biblical scholars as to which was the greatest. They had delegated some to be weighty of the 613 and some to be relatively light but they were constantly debating which was the greatest and so they were trying to suck Jesus in to this debate. So, in response to that kind of antagonistic question, notice how Jesus responds. Verse 37: “He said to them,” It’s easy, “you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” He says listen, here it is, the greatest command. Love God with every ounce of your being your entire life. That’s the greatest command. By the way, this command dumps us at the feet of God begging for mercy and grace, doesn’t it? Because not a single one of us has done this, not a single one of us has met THE greatest commandment God has given to us. It makes us show it makes us see our need for Christ and for the redemption of Him.

But then He says, verse 38: “This is the great and foremost commandment.” Or first commandment. Verse 39, the second, you didn’t ask but I’ll tell you, “The second is like it. “You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.” Law being the first five books of the Old Testament, Prophets being everything else, this was a comprehensive expression for all of God’s revelation to that point. He said everything that God has ever said can be summarized in these two basic commands; love God and love others, love your neighbor as yourself.

Now in the parallel passage in Luke 10, there’s an attempt to sort of scoot out of this command, this uncomfortable situation and so the question comes: Well, okay, uhh WHO is my neighbor? Jesus goes on, you remember, to tell the story of the Good Samaritan. The point of the story, don’t miss it, the point of the story is that your neighbor is anybody that God sovereignly brings across your path, whether it’s the people who live in your home or the person you run into at the gas station or whatever it may be. The bottom line is any person God brings into our lives sovereignly through His purpose we are to love, no exceptions. Next to God, people, Jesus says, must be our priority. So we know it’s important because it’s the second greatest commandment.

We also know it’s important because it’s a comprehensive summary, love is a comprehensive summary of every other command and that’s what Jesus, of course, says here in verse 40, “on

these two commands depend the whole Law and the Prophets.” Paul says it as well back in Romans 13:8, he says, “Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another;” This isn’t a prohibition, by the way, against borrowing; the Old Testament allowed it and laid down strict regulations for how it was to be carried out. What is his point here is if you’re going to be obligated to anybody, then let it be an obligation to love them, “for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law.” And then he mentions four of the commandments regarding other people. Don’t commit adultery, don’t murder, don’t steal, don’t covet and if there’s any other commandment about our relationship to people it is summed up in this saying you shall love your neighbor as yourself. Why is that a summary? Verse 10, because “love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.” If you love someone you’re not going to do those things against them. And so it is a comprehensive summary of every other command.

A fourth reason we know that this is a command with great primacy and priority is that without love every spiritual enterprise is worthless. Without love every spiritual enterprise is worthless. Paul makes this point in 1 Corinthians 13, the great love chapter in the first three verses. In verse 1, he says “If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.” He says, listen, if I had the eloquence of men or even of angels, but I don’t have love, it’s like I’m just a clanging, noisy cymbal. You know what he’s saying? He’s saying you can speak with the greatest of eloquence but if you don’t have love, nothing you say matters. In verse 2, he says no ministry or gift matters without love. “If I have the gift of prophecy and know all mysteries and all knowledge;” he’s talking here of spiritual gifts, “and I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.” In verse 3, he says no personal sacrifice matters without love. He says, “if I give all my possessions to feed the poor,” everything, if I sell everything and feed the poor with it, “and if I surrender my body to be burned, but I don’t have love it profits me nothing.” By the way did you catch that you can give everything away and give it to the poor without having love? You can also even give yourself and your life without really genuinely having love. You can do those things for yourself and for your own glory and for your reputation or for your own self-righteous way to somehow satisfy God. If you do those things without love – it doesn’t matter.

Another way, a fifth way that we understand the primacy of loving others is because of faith hope and love, these this triad of God’s gifts. Love is the only one that’s permanent; it’s the only one that lasts. Look at verse 8: “Love never fails.” Verse 13: “But now faith, hope, and love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.” Why? Because folks, some day faith will be sight, some day hope will be fulfilled, but love will always be our responsibility to God and to others.

Finally, we know that love is to be our priority. Loving others is to be our priority because it is one clear way that we show our love for God. In 1 John chapter 4, on several different occasions and you can read, and we won’t take time to turn there, but in verses 20 and 21, John the Apostle

makes is clear that in loving others we express the genuineness of our love for God. Folks, do you understand how important this is to God? Take just a moment and think about this. If God could tell you how to simplify your life, you know sometimes the Christian life is fairly complicated. We have a book made up of 66 books, it takes a long time just to read it, much less to grasp all the commands. I love it when things are simplified. Well, Jesus simplified it for us folks. Do you want to know what your duty to God is? Here it is. Love God with all your heart and love other people as you love yourself. Do you want to know how important it is? Next to loving God, loving people is the second greatest duty you have before God. So obviously this is not a small priority to God, it's second on the list.

Now let's look at the second feature of this command to love one another. We've seen the primacy of loving one another. Let's look at the point of loving one another. What does this command actually mean? Well, let's start with the definition. The Greek word that almost always occurs with this command to love one another is a very familiar Greek word if you've been in the church any time at all, it's the word "agape." This word is used only of believers' love for man or God, or for God's love. So in another words, it's a divine kind of love.

The word agape was relatively unknown in the secular Greek language until the Septuagint. Greek had several words for love, although the word agape existed it had not really been defined or clarified or informed by common usage and so it's not surprising that when the translators of the Septuagint translating the Hebrew Old Testament wanted to choose a Greek word that they could give meaning to through its use in the Old Testament, they chose this word "agape" as the word for the Hebrew word for love, "ahav." It is a reasoned love. It is not a love based on emotion; let me let me clarify that. It's not based on emotion but it's not void of emotion either. It's a love that is your entire being. It's irrespective of the worth or response of the object. It is a self-sacrificial, self-giving love. Here's my definition. This kind of love, agape love is the unselfish, self-sacrificing desire to meet the needs of another regardless of their worthiness of it or their response to it. Let me say that again. It is the unselfish, self-sacrificing desire to meet the needs of another regardless of their worthiness of it or their response to it.

You know although a definition of the Greek word may be helpful, it's even more helpful to see it in action. What does this kind of love look like in action? What does love look like in work clothes? What exactly is it that our Lord is commanding us to do? I don't have time this morning to show you every practical way that this virtue demonstrates itself. But I do want to show you several key ways that we can practically love one another. Let me give you a little list. This is the point.

Number one. Do good to others expecting nothing in return; do good to others expecting nothing in return. Luke 6:32, Jesus in these timeless words says: If you love those who love you what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who

do good to you, what credit is that? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those to whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive back the same amount. But love your enemies, and here it is do good, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for God Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men.

You want to show love to other people? Then just start doing good without expecting anything for it. Without expecting to be praised, without expecting some return, without expecting them to like you and want your company. Just do good without expecting anything in return.

Number two. Humbly and menially serve others; humbly and menially serve others. Turn to John chapter 13. Jesus, in this passage, sets the supreme example of serving love. John 13, you remember, is the night before the crucifixion, Jesus' ministry to the public is done and now He's ministering His disciples. And verse 1 of John 13 says:

Now before the Feast of Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, [that's the disciples], He loved them [literally] to the uttermost.

To the maximum extent. He loved them perfectly, completely and the story that follows illustrates that love. You remember what happens:

Jesus (verse 3), knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God, (In other words, Jesus had a perfect handle on who He was and what was about to happen. But in spite of that, notice verse 4, He) got up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself. Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.

Now understand what was happening here, culturally. In the in that ancient world, there were no paved roads except for the major highways the Romans had built in a few places to connect the continent. But beyond that, all the roads were dirt and so as you walked around your city and as you walked from home to a place where you were going to have a meal together, your feet collected the dirt of the road and as a common courtesy as you entered that persons home and also as a way to keep their home clean, they would have the lowest slave clean your feet as you entered the home; the same slave who got the privy pot duties. This was the bottom of the rung and he was responsible to wash the feet. Apparently, in this case, it hadn't happened and so Jesus, as a part of supper, gets up and pours water into the basin and He takes that duty on Himself.

Now understand this, anyone of these disciples would have been willing to wash Jesus' feet because it was perfectly appropriate for you to wash the feet of someone who was much your superior. But none of them would have been willing to wash each other's feet. That wasn't heard of in the culture. You never washed a peer's feet. Someone much lower than you was responsible to wash the feet. And so Jesus shocks their sensibilities, and He does so to teach them two lessons. The first lesson is of course given in the interchange there with Peter where Peter, ever the one to put his foot in his mouth, says, "Lord, You're going to wash my feet?" And Jesus said, "Listen you don't understand what I'm doing, just go along with what I'm telling you to do here." Verse 8: "Peter said to Him, 'Never shall You wash my feet!' Jesus answered him, [Well] If I don't wash you, you have no part with Me." Again, Peter ever eager and impulsive says, "Lord then don't wash only my feet, but also my hands and my head. Jesus said to him, 'He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean;'" Jesus' point here is that justification, the full forgiveness of sin, is like a bath and once that's happened, once you have repented and believed in Christ, you are clean, you have been justified, you have been forgiven of sin and declared righteous before God. And you don't need to have that happen again. But, as we walk through this world, we do collect the dirt of the world, we collect sin. What are we to do with that? Well there's to be a continual repentance and confession and God extends forgiveness. That's like the washing of our feet and that's to be a daily thing and not merely once a day but often throughout the day.

That was the first lesson Jesus wanted to teach but the primary lesson He wanted to teach comes in verse 12: "So when He had washed their feet and taken His garments He reclined at the table again and then He said to them... [Alright you know what I did, you understand what's happened here?]" Verse 13, "You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

What's Jesus saying? He's saying listen, you are responsible to love each other as I love you and part of what that love means is understanding that there is no service too low, too menial, too servile for you to do to one another. This was the bottom. This was what the lowest slave did and Jesus said I do that to you and you are to do that to each other. You are to humbly and menially serve one another.

There are so many examples of this that came to my mind this week but none stood out as much as one from Grace Church. There's a man at Grace Church, who's still there, who is terribly handicapped. He is in a wheelchair, he, it's a motorized chair that allows him to get around, he has to have transport wherever he goes. He can't speak, very well to be understood, so he has a little sort of computer that allows him to punch in a few things and to communicate through that

computer. He also has a little bag that collects the waste from his body and it always illustrated this reality to me, this responsibility we have to humbly and menially serve others, when Chris Parkening, the world's most foremost classical guitarist, who is also a member of our church there who knew this man, often just before Chris was supposed to get up and play in the service, this man would come find Chris and ask him if he could help him and Chris would always, with a joyful and eager heart, go to the men's room with this man and help him empty his little bag in the toilet. That's what Christ is saying. There is no duty too low for us to do for each other. We are to humbly and menially serve one another.

Number three. We're to practically care for and be generous with those in need; we're to practically care for and be generous with those in need. This is how love expresses itself. Turn to Luke chapter 10, I mentioned this passage a little earlier, it's the story of course of the Good Samaritan. In Luke 10, as Jesus illustrates what love to a neighbor looks like; in verse 33, He describes the Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon this man who had fallen among robbers been stripped and beaten and left for half dead. He:

came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, and he came to him and he bandaged up his wounds pouring oil and wine on them; (Oil and wine was sort of the ancient first aid kit. Wine being an antiseptic with its alcohol to cleanse the wound and oil being to soothe and give it some healing capacity.) and then he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him. On the next day he took out two denarii [that would be equivalent to two days wages] and gave them to the innkeeper and said, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you.' Which of these three (Jesus had already mentioned a Levite and a priest who had just walked by right by, didn't want to get involved), Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' hands? And he said, 'The one who showed mercy toward him.' Then Jesus said to him, 'Go and do the same.'

Jesus said that's how you show love to your neighbor. You care for them in the moment of need, in the moment of difficulty, in the moment of trouble.

You see the same point in 1 John chapter 3, where the Apostle John says verse 17, "Whoever has the world's goods," [that means you've got what you need, more than you need] "and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and in truth." One way to express the love of God to others is to care for them and be generous with them when they find themselves in need.

Number four. Pray for and seek to help those in extreme trials; pray for and seek to help those in extreme trials. Galatians 6:2 says, "Bear one another's burdens." The word "burden" there is a

heavy unbearable load; a load that cannot be carried by one person. Jesus says, when somebody you know is facing an unbearable load, a trial, a difficulty, a problem that is absolutely pressing them and crushing them, then bear it with them. That means pray for them, that means practically help in whatever way you can. “And thereby” Paul says in Galatians 6, “thereby fulfill the law of Christ.” What’s the law of Christ? The law to love. We show that we are loving others when we bear their heavy loads with them.

Number five. Be patient with and quick to forgive personal offenses; be patient with and quick to forgive personal offenses. This is a way you can show love. There are a number of passages that make this point but let me just show you one, Ephesians 4:2. In verse 1, Paul says I want you to walk in a way that’s in keeping with the calling you’ve received. Do that, verse 2, “with all humility and gentleness, with patience,” and then he says, “showing tolerance for one another in love.” Now that translation makes it sound like “put up with them in love.” Well, there’s a sense in which that’s true but there’s more to this word. It has more the idea of a patient forbearance, an understanding, patient, forgiving spirit. It’s really captured in the last verse of chapter 4, “Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ has also forgiven you.” That’s what he’s talking about. We can show love for others by being quick to forgive personal offenses. Listen, people sin against you and me all the time. It happens in our homes, it happens in our business, it happens in school, it happens in church. And we can show love, genuine Christian love, by not holding onto those personal offenses. In 1 Peter 4:8, Peter says, “I want you to be fervent in your love because love covers a multitude of sins.” What does he mean? He means love is quick to forgive personal wrongs to overlook personal offenses.

Number six. If you want to demonstrate love, then gently confront unrepentant sin; gently confront unrepentant sin. We don’t normally think of that as love, do we? Yet listen to the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 2:4, he says, “For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you...” Now he’s describing there, Paul had written two other letters to the Corinthians. He had written 1 Corinthians, we have in our Bibles, and between 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians, he’d written a letter that biblical scholars call the “severe letter.” It’s a letter in which he really jumped on the Corinthians for tolerating sin in the congregation. And he says, “I wrote to you with many tears not so that you would be made sorrowful, but that you might know the love which I have especially for you.” You see, we express love for other people when we gently, graciously confront their unrepentant sin.

Number seven. Don’t use your liberty to cause others to sin. If you love them, you’re not going to use your liberty to make them sin. Romans 14:15, as Paul deals in Romans 14 with the whole issue of Christian liberty, he says, “For if because of food your brother is hurt,”; in other words if you eat something, in this case food offered to idols, was the illustration he was using, “you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy him with your food him for whom Christ

died.” Do you know what Paul is saying? Be careful what you do, don’t use your liberty and run it out to the maximum and in doing so, cause somebody else to sin. You can love others by being aware that your influence might cause them to sin and avoiding that at all cost.

And number eight. Finally, show love by how you relate to people. Show love, you can show love for others by how you relate to them day in and day out in the conversations of life. Let me show you what that’s supposed to look like. First Corinthians 13. First Corinthians 13, again, in the middle of this great love chapter, Paul tells us what our day to day interaction with people is to look like if we really love them. Here it is. If you want to know whether or not you’re a loving person, take the test. “Love” verse 4, “is patient, kind and is not jealous; does not brag and is not arrogant. It does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, it’s not provoked easily, it does not take into account a wrong suffered. It does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; it bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” Does that describe your day to day relationships with other people? This is how we can express love to others, is by relating to them in this way.

Those are some of the crucial ways that we can demonstrate love for others. We’ve examined the primacy of loving others, the point of loving others. Let’s look finally at the path to loving one another. Stay with me just for a moment; the path. You see, not a single one of us when you look at that list. Not a single one of us consistently loves others like we ought to. But if you’re a believer in Jesus Christ, you’re sitting there this morning and you’re thinking, “I want to; I need to.” So, the question is how can we make progress toward fulfilling this basic command of our Lord’s? Well fortunately Scripture tells us how we can grow in our love for others. Let me give you again a brief list.

Number one. Pursue it; pursue it. In other words, it’s got to matter to you, you have to chase after it. Listen to Paul, 1 Timothy 6:11, “pursue love.” Second Timothy 2:22, “pursue love.” Peter in 2 Peter 1:7, “applying all diligence, supply love.” Pursue it. Let it matter to you that you’re not a loving person if you don’t show practically that love to others.

Number two. Pray. Pray that God would strengthen your love for others. First Thessalonians 3:12, “may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another.” That was Paul’s prayer for the Thessalonians. Let that be your prayer for you and for this church. Let us increase in our love. First Thessalonians 4:9, “now as to the love of the brethren, you yourselves are taught by God to love one another.” Pray that God would teach you what it’s like to love others.

Number three. Meditate on God’s love for you. I won’t turn there but you remember in John’s epistle, 1 John, he says, “we love,” why? “because He first loved us.” Reflect on God’s love for you and it will cause your own love for God and your own love for others to grow.

Number four. Study the word of God. You want your love to grow? Study the word. Listen to Paul, 1 Timothy 1:5, “the goal of our instruction,” Paul says to Timothy, “is love.” What Paul has written is summarized in the desire to see people love God and love others. So study the word, it’s intended to take you that direction. First Peter 1:22, “you have an obedience to the truth; purify your souls for a sincere love of the brethren.” As you’ve responded to the truth you’ve become committed to love.

Number five. Learn from the example of others. You want to love? Watch others. Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:10, “you [Timothy] followed my ... love.” You saw me and you saw it in action and you learned. Look at the people you know you genuinely love and follow their example. Hebrews 10:24, “let us consider how to stimulate one another to love.” Other people can stimulate us to love by their love, by following their example.

Number six. Obey. Just obey. We’re commanded to do this. Hebrews 13:1, “let love of the brethren continue.” First Peter 2:17, “love the brothers.” First Peter 4:8, “above all, keep fervent in your love for one another.” Just determine before God that as He gives you the grace and strength you’re going to obey. You’re going to make this a priority in your life.

Number seven. Use your spiritual gift in the life of the church. Use the gift God has given you in the life of this church. Listen to Paul in Ephesians 4:16. He says, “the whole body when it’s fitted and held together by what every joint supplies as every individual part works, it causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.” You see, when you and I fill the role God has made for us here; when we serve like we’re supposed serve here, the whole church grows in love, including yourself.

Lastly, if you want to love others you must first become a genuine Christian. It may be that your lack of love is because you’ve never known the love of God, because God’s love has never been shed abroad in your heart. Listen to the Apostle John in 1 John chapter 3; he says in verse 10, “by this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious.” Here it is it’s obvious, you want to know? “Anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.” Verse 14, “we know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death.” You’ve got to be a true Christian to truly love and that may be the issue as to why there is no love for others in your heart.

Now let me give you just a couple of real practical steps. I’m almost done, stay with me, I’ve taken more time than I had planned to, I had fewer pages of notes for this sermon than I normally have and it’s still taken me longer because of the sheer volume of material I wanted to cover with you. But, real quickly let me ask you this. If you want to begin loving others what are some practical steps you can take?

Let me give you two. Number one. Seek to change your thinking. Let the word of God change your thinking. Change your thinking about yourself. Listen, it's not okay to be an island. It's not okay to be independent. It's not okay to waltz into this church and waltz out every Sunday and never have connection with others. That's not okay; change your mind about yourself. Change your mind about people. They are not interruptions to your life. According to God next to Him they are your greatest priority. Change your mind about relationships, this is a big one. Change your mind about relationships. Listen folks, relationships do not exist to bring us personal happiness and fulfillment. Relationships exist for us to be an instrument in our Redeemer's hands to minister to, to serve, and express the love of Christ to them. So change your thinking.

And secondly, just get to know some other people. It seems pretty simple doesn't it? But introduce yourself to somebody you don't know. Maybe today, say, hey let's get together this week for a cup of coffee or let's go out for a meal or maybe after the service, grab somebody you don't know and say let's get to know each other. Make time to get together. Purposefully ask meaningful questions about them. And listen; don't just ask them who their favorite sports team is, although that's okay, too. But don't leave it there. And listen and then determine how you can demonstrate the love of Christ to them.

Folks, love is very important to God. Loving one another is the greatest human commandment, next to loving God it is the second greatest priority in the life of the believer. Is it for you? Can you honestly say before the Lord this morning that next to loving God the greatest priority of your life is loving other people? May God make it so. Let's pray together.

Father, thank You for Your truth, thank You for this study. But Lord, don't let us just be hearers. Help us to resolve before You to make Your priorities our priorities. Lord help us to reorder our schedules. Help us to dump our tasks list and think again about what matters to You. Help us to live even as our Lord lived. We pray it in Jesus' name, Amen.