

The One Anothers (Part 2)
Selected Scriptures
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For those of you who are visiting with us I probably should tell you that we are taking a brief break from our year plus study of the letter of James. We've finished chapter four and, Lord willing, in a few weeks we'll pick up with chapter five. But we've taken a break for a specific purpose and that is to look in great detail at what the New Testament says about our responsibility to each other. This is not, by the way, because there's some serious lack of expression of loving and caring for one another here, but rather because it is so foundational and so important to the life of the church and as the church grows, as God is continuing to bring others to us, it becomes important for us all to have a common understanding of what our responsibility to each other really is. We are, in essence, to be servants to one another.

This week I came across what struck me as a very profound illustration of the kind of selfless spirit that is genuinely concern for others and how far it will go to serve others. I found it in the life of the Apostle Paul. Turn to Acts 27 and 28. Briefly, let me remind you of his circumstances in these two chapters. His circumstances were very, very difficult. Paul has been placed under arrest by the Romans, he's chained to a Roman guard, facing an uncertain future that may include even execution in spite of the fact that he is utterly innocent of the charges that have been brought against him. On top of that, he was placed on a ship with 275 other people and because they sailed at the wrong time and at a time when the weather was treacherous, they have, by the time we come to the portion I'm going to show you in just a moment, they have spent the last 14 days without food; probably a combination of seasickness and just inability to prepare it. They're caught in such a violent storm that no one is able even to eat; according to chapter 27 verse 33. And after all of that, the ship, as you know, wrecks on a reef and through God's incredible goodness and providence, all 276 people on board survive and make it to land. And God used Paul, in the midst of that circumstance, to accomplish that incredible miracle of survival so that there's a sense in which Paul becomes a kind of folk hero to all those people on board, those 275 other people who survived this incredible ordeal.

Now how would you react to those circumstances? It's hard to imagine really a worse circumstance than that. You have been arrested, taken from everything that you know and love, find yourself accused of things you didn't do facing possible execution and then you're in the middle of a shipwreck you go without food for 14 days and finally you make it to land. I want you to see in the midst of those circumstances Paul's amazing heart of service. Chapter 28 verse 1, "When they [that is all of the people on board] had been brought safely through, then..." Luke says, "we found out that the island was called Malta." The people who lived there, "the natives showed us extraordinary kindness; for because of the rain that had set in and because of

the cold, they kindled a fire and received us all.” But I want you to see is verse 3, because in verse 3, we catch Paul, just a glimpse of this great man, this man with a power intellect with a great ministry chained to a Roman guard, wrongly accused now a hero of sorts and in the midst of those circumstances, what is Paul doing? Verse 3, “When Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire...” Paul, even in that circumstance, is in the midst of serving others. He goes on to serve the rest of the people on the island. You remember down in verse 7, “Now in the neighborhood of that place were lands belonging to the leading man of the island, named Publius, who welcomed us and entertained us courteously three days. And it happened that the man’s father was lying in bed afflicted with recurrent fever and dysentery; and Paul went in to see him and after he had prayed, he laid his hands on him and healed him. After this had happened, the rest of the people on Malta who had diseases were coming to him and getting cured.” So Paul, in the midst of the worst of circumstances, continually is concerned about and is serving others. What an incredible example of the spirit that we are to have for one another.

We began, last week, to look in the New Testament at those, some 50 plus times we encounter these commands of our responsibility to be or to do something to one another. We commonly call these commands the “one anothers.” And that 50 or so and that’s rough number includes a lot of repetition so that all of these occurrences can be placed into a relatively small number of categories or groups. Now there are a number of ways that we can legitimately group them. I’ve chosen, for our study, four categories that I think will include most of the 50 or so of these commands; four key words that summarize those four categories. If you can remember these four words and I’ll fill out your knowledge of them and what they mean over the coming couple of weeks. But if you can remember these four words, you’ll have a decent grasp of our responsibility to each other. The four words are: motivation, occupation, orientation and conversation.

Motivation. Last week we looked at our motive, what our motivation is to be. It’s to be love, genuine love for other people. We are to be motivated in every interaction toward one another by a genuine love. Today I want us to look briefly at the second category and that is occupation. What is to be the thrust of our ministry to one another? What are to be the overarching goals that we’re to have? What are we to be occupied with? You see, when you think about the word “occupation,” you think of career; what occupies the majority of your time and energy. You may do other things, but your occupation is what you do primarily. And what is to be our occupation in our ministry to one another?

Well, there are two recurring commands that are overarching in the direction they give and that mark out for us the occupation of our lives toward one another; the command to build up one another and the command to serve one another. You may work as a pilot or a doctor or a businessman or a housewife or a teacher or some other capacity, but when it comes to your responsibility to other Christians you have two occupations. You are a builder, or you’re to be a

builder and a servant. Now in our study this morning, I want us to study these two commands that are to be our occupations.

First, we are to build up one another. The concept of building up other believers was a passion of the Apostle Paul's and he often refers to it. In fact, turn to 2 Corinthians, you see that his letter to the Corinthians, his second letter here that we have recorded for us, recounts this passion again and again. Second Corinthians chapter 10 verse 8, as Paul writes to the Corinthians defending his apostleship against those false apostles that had gathered in Corinth and were trying to undermine Paul, he says in verse 8, "For even if I boast somewhat further about our authority..." (Now watch this, our authority as an apostle. Paul says I have apostolic authority, "which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you..." Paul says the passion of my life, the direction of my ministry is to build you up. In chapter 12 verse 19, he makes the same point, "All this time you have been thinking that we are defending ourselves to you. Actually, it is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ; and all for your upbuilding, beloved." To build you up. Chapter 13 verse 10, "For this reason I am writing these things while absent, so that when present I need not use severity in accordance with the authority..." (Here he is back to that authority he has as an apostle, he says the same thing) "which the Lord gave me for building up and not for tearing down."

Paul says here is the heart of my ministry: it is to build you up. And in his writings Paul constantly refers to the image of a building to make this clear. We've been studying together on Sunday night that the church is often pictured as a building. The building can be the universal church that is all true believers that, together, constitute a building or a temple as it's usually described. You see this in Ephesians chapter 2, turn there for a moment, Ephesians 2 you see this image, verse 19, "we are of God's household," He ends verse 19, Ephesians 2, "having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the corner stone, In whom the whole building [that is all of those all of those who have genuinely believed in Christ] being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together [Ephesians] into the dwelling of God in the Spirit." So the building can be the entire body of people who are true believers in Jesus Christ, wherever they may be across the world and across time. Or the building can also be not only the universal church, but the local church. First Corinthians chapter 3 verse 9 Paul writes to the Corinthians, "you"[that is you there in Corinth "are the temple of God."

So the church is like a temple built by God Himself to be His dwelling. Now here's where the command to build one another up comes in. It's based out of that image of the church as a building. This church, Countryside Bible Church, just like the church in Corinth is, figuratively speaking, the temple of God, the place where God especially manifests His presence. Now I'm not talking about this building, I'm talking about the people who make up the church. We the people are the church, not a building. Together we, as believers, here in this place are the temple of God. Paul, again, writing to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 6:16 says, "For we are the

temple of the living God, just as God said, ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them and I will be their God and they shall be My people.’” We are a dwelling for God. We are indwelt in a special way by His Spirit. That’s what the church is. Now listen carefully. In that New Testament image of the church as a building, as a temple each one of us is a stone in that temple. Listen to Peter in 1 Peter 2:5, “You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house...” So there’s a sense in which each of us is a stone in this temple, if you will, in which our God specially manifests His presence. But we’re not merely a stone, we’re also to be builders, we’re to assist in the building.

This becomes clearer in the commands that are throughout the New Testament. Here’s one example, 1 Thessalonians 5:11. Paul, in the context, has just told the people in Thessalonica that some day we will live together with Christ, and he says, “Therefore,” 1 Thessalonians 5:11, “Therefore encourage one another and build up one another.” Build up one another. You see all of us are to have the mindset of builders. We cannot, we must not, destroy other stones or other believers by our words or by our actions. In fact, God takes very seriously when we enter His house, the church and take out our sledge hammer and, as it were, begin to damage the other stones. In fact, in 1 Corinthians 3:16, Paul says this, you [Corinthians] are a temple, your church in Corinth constitutes a temple listen to what he says, “If any man destroys that temple, God will destroy him...” So we’re not to tear down stones we’re not to damage other stones by our actions, instead, we are to build up one another.

Now as you go through Paul’s writings you see this recurring again and again. If you come to 1 Corinthians chapter 8, for example, and he begins a section in 1 Corinthians 8:1 dealing with Christian liberty and specifically dealing with issues of conscience. Now I’m going to touch on that several times so let me just clarify and make sure you understand. Scripture very clearly commands certain things and Scripture very clearly forbids other things. But there are a number of things in our lives about which we have to make decisions that aren’t dealt with in a clear chapter and verse in Scripture. Those decisions we need to make, those categories are called issues of conscience or places where we can exercise our Christian liberty. Whether you’re talking music or dress or there are a whole number of issues that fall into this area of issues of conscience and Paul and the Holy Spirit tell us exactly how it is we should address these things that aren’t directly either forbidden or demanded in the Scripture. And he does so in Romans chapter 14 and in 1 Corinthians chapter 8 through 10.

As Paul introduce this section in 1 Corinthians chapter 8 on issues of conscience, listen to what he writes in verse 1. He says, “Now concerning things sacrificed to idols...” Now here he’s picking out a contemporary example of an issue of conscience, and it was is it okay for a Christian to buy the meat that was sacrificed to a pagan god? You could go and out the back door of the pagan temple and you could buy a pretty good cut of meat really cheap because somebody had already had to pay for that to have it sacrificed, so they could offer you a great

discount. A lot of Christians went, as we all like discounts, they went and they enjoyed the meat. Other Christians said how could you do that? That's been sacrificed to idols! And so there was this disagreement. This was an issue that wasn't clearly addressed in the Scripture and so Paul lays down principles and the principles he lays down apply not only to the eating of meat sacrificed to idols but all of these issues of conscience that we have to address as well.

As he begins that, 1 Corinthians 8:1, "Now concerning those things [he says], we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies." That Greek word for edifies is the same word for building. To edify is simply to build up. It literally means to build a structure. And here, listen carefully; this comes to the heart of it. What does it mean to build up? When this word, "to edify" is used figuratively as it is here and as it is in these other contexts we're looking, it always refers to promoting another Christian's spiritual growth and health. To build up another person is to promote their spiritual growth and health. Paul goes on in 1 Corinthians chapter 10, at the end of the section on Christian liberty, verse 23, he says, "All things are lawful..." All of these things that haven't been clearly forbidden by Scripture, they're lawful, "but not all things are profitable." All things are lawful, but not all things what, edify or build up, so even as you think about your Christian liberty, you are to consider what will build others up, what will promote other Christian spiritual growth and development. Paul says the same thing in Romans chapter 14 where he deals with this same issue of Christian liberty. Romans 14:19, he says, "So then let us pursue the things which make for the building up of one another." Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of these issues of conscience, he says. Chapter 15 of Romans verse 1, he tells us that those who are strong, that is who think it's okay to eat meat sacrificed to idols, ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength, those who think it's a problem and not just please ourselves. "Each of us" Romans 15:2, "is to please his neighbor for his good, to his [or with the goal of] his edification." His being built up, his spiritual growth and development.

This concept occurs in other contexts as well. For example, what about when the church meets for worship. This is to be a preoccupation not only are we primarily to meet for worship but we're also to meet to build one another up and we're to do those things which will encourage and promote spiritual growth. First Corinthians chapter 14, as Paul deals with the problem in Corinth, tongues the abuse of it. He says in 1 Corinthians 14:1, "Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially the gift of prophesy." Now, in this context, prophesy is nothing more than the capacity to speak publicly the word of God; to speak forth or to proclaim the word of God, much as I am doing to you this morning. And he says you need to seek that gift, why? Verse 3, "But the one who prophesies speaks to men for building up." Verse 12, "So also you, since you since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, seek to abound for (what will build up the church) what will edify the church." Verse 26, and he says listen when you get together and there's all this confusion and you're all doing your own thing, the end of verse 26, "Let all things [in the corporate worship] be done for [what builds up, what edifies]."

So whether you're talking about Christian liberty or when we come together as a church or even our daily communication. In Ephesians 4:29, Paul says, "don't let any corrupt word proceed from your mouth but only such a word as is good for..."

What? "edification." Building up others, we are to speak in such a way as to build others up to promote their spiritual growth.

So folks, get the picture, the church is a building, a temple of God and Christ is building this temple and He's shaping and honing every one of us. Every stone, so that we fit perfectly together and you and I are to assist in the building by promoting the spiritual growth of the believers around us. Now let me just ask you a pointed question this morning. Can the people that live in your home honestly say that you promote by your example, by your words their spiritual growth and development? Can the people who know you in this church honestly say before the Lord that you are building them up that you are promoting their spiritual growth and health?

How can you do it? How can you build others up? How can you promote the spiritual growth of other Christians? Well let me encourage you to come on Wednesday nights because we are studying this very thing, very practically. And if for some reason you can't come on Wednesday night to the men's and women's Bible study then I encourage you to pick up a copy of the book we're studying entitled "Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands." It deals with this very issue of how to be involved as an instrument of change in the life of others. In fact I like the subtitle of the book; it's called "People in Need of Change, Helping People in Need of Change." That's what we're talking about. That's what it means to build up. If you're a Christian, your occupation is to promote the spiritual growth of other Christians.

You know I think it's fascinating that the Holy Spirit chose this image to picture the church. Because in the ancient world temples required a great amount of time to build. Take Herod's temple, for example. It took 84 years to build Herod's temple. In fact, they completed it just 6 years before 70 AD when it was all destroyed. Several visits to England, I've had the opportunity as some of you have had to visit Canterbury Cathedral, that magnificent building. To complete that amazing structure as it stands today took over 1,000 years.

And you know, I really think the Holy Spirit chose this image of a temple for this very reason because it describes the faithful painstaking patient work that we are to invest in each other's lives. Rome wasn't built in a day and neither is the church. And neither is every individual stone shaped and fitted for his or her place in the church of God in a day. It takes time and patience, but we are to be engaged in that process. So we are to be builders. We are to build one another up.

Our second occupation is to be servants. Not only are we to build one another up, but we are to serve one another. There're so many places where we're commanded to do this, one example is Galatians 5:13. There, in the context, Paul is saying, listen you are free now from the Law as a way of trying to achieve a righteousness of your own, a salvation of your own. He said but don't use that freedom as an opportunity to pursue the satisfaction of your flesh, instead he says, through love serve one another. This word "serve" is a common New Testament word. It originally meant to wait on tables. In fact, it's used in this sense in a number of places in the New Testament. For example, in Mark 1:31, you remember Peter's mother-in-law, after she was healed, gets up and serves them food. It's used this way of Martha in Luke 10:40 and her serving Jesus and the disciples' food. In John chapter 2, it's used of the servants who are serving at the wedding there in Cana. In John 12:2, it's used again of Martha serving Jesus. In Acts 6:2, it's used of the seven you remember who were going to serve the Greek widows food every day. It means to wait tables, it's what it means. It later came to refer to any menial service of any kind to someone else.

The Greeks, by the way, held those who filled such roles in very low esteem. They believed that ruling, not serving was the appropriate role for man. In fact one Greek writer says this, "How can a man be happy when he has to serve someone else?" That's pretty much the perspective of our day as well, isn't it? And yet it's not God's perspective. Think, for a moment, about the teaching and example of Christ. If you think it's beneath you to be a servant to other Christians, then listen to what Christ said about this and carefully consider His own example. Turn to Mark chapter 20 where I think we see our Lord's teaching on this in brilliant clarity. Matthew 20:20. Matthew gives us the circumstance, "the mother of the sons of Zebedee, (James and John) came to Jesus with her sons, bowing down and making a request of Him." The synoptic gospels tell us that all three of them came with this request, privately. Matthew, here, records the one from the mother of James and John. I can't imagine these boys weren't embarrassed after all this happened, I hope they were. Verse 21, "Jesus said to her, 'What do you wish?' and she said to Him, 'Command that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit one on Your right and one on Your left.' Jesus answered and said, 'You don't know what you're asking. Are you able to drink the cup I'm about to drink?' They said, 'We are able.' And He said, 'My cup you shall drink;'" In other words he was telling them that they would suffer and eventually die for His name sake. James was beheaded and John was tortured and exiled to the island of Patmos where he died. He says, "It's true you're going to drink of this cup; but to sit on My right or on My left this is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father. And hearing this," [You knew this was going to happen,] "the ten (the other guys) became indignant with the two brothers." Of course they all had been arguing about who was the greatest so don't feel like they have the moral high ground here. But Jesus uses this as a teaching opportunity here. Verse 25, "He called them to Himself and said, 'Let me tell you, you understand that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them.' He says listen, you understand that greatness is defined in our world by power and

authority. It's still the same in ours. Verse 26, 'It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall become your deacon,' is what it says, 'your servant.' and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your (doulos) slave;" And then He uses Himself as an example, He says "just as the Son of Man did not come to be served,"; have you ever thought about that, Jesus didn't come to be served. Oh there were times when individual Christians served Him, but that wasn't the purpose and intent of His mission. His mission was to serve. And He did that by healing and by helping people, doing good as the gospels tell us. But most profoundly He did it as He says here by "giving His life as a ransom for many."

Jesus is a perfect example of how we're to serve. If Jesus came to serve, to wait tables then that's what we ought to do as well.

But what exactly does this service look like for us? That's how it looked for Jesus, what does it look like for us? How can we actually practice this command to serve this week? Well there are two primary ways in the New Testament service demonstrates itself.

Number one: caring for the physical needs of others, caring for the physical needs of others very practically. It can mean giving to meet those needs. For example, in Acts 11:29, it's used that way, its translated "relief" there. It's used the same way to describe financial support in 1 Corinthians 8:4 and in 1 Corinthians 9:1. In a few minutes you're going to have the opportunity to give to the benevolence fund. That is serving the saints.

But caring for the needs of others goes beyond giving. Sometimes the easiest thing in the world is to give some money, isn't it? But actually serving often requires much more active involvement, energy and time. Let me show you what real service looks like on this practical level. Turn to Matthew 25. In Matthew 25 verse 31, we encounter a judgment, often called the "judgment of the nations." This is not probably the great white throne of judgment; rather it is the judgment that occurs at the end of the tribulation period of those who have survived the tribulation. It's called the judgment of the nations, but that's really not exactly accurate. It's a judgment of individuals. And notice as they're there, verse 34 says, "the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'" What I want you to see here is that they're entering the kingdom because of grace. God chose them as we've talked about in divine election before the foundation of the world and they're entering in because of that gracious sovereign choice. But their works demonstrate the reality of their faith. The works that are listed here are not the root of their salvation, but the fruit of it. Notice what He says, verse 35, Jesus, now, speaking to these people. "I was hungry and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to me. The righteous are going to say, "Lord when did that happen?" Verse 40, "The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to

you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even to the least of them, you did it to Me.' Then He'll also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me accursed ones into eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels.'" And then He says the opposite was true with them. "I was hungry and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty and you gave Me nothing to drink;" And so on. Verse 44 they're going to respond. Wait a minute! "Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and" Watch this. "did not take care of You?" You see "did not take care of You?" That's our word for serve. When did we not serve You? When did we not wait on You? What you have here folks is a definition of service. It's clothing, those who have no clothes. It's inviting strangers in. It's visiting those in hardship, in prison and in hospitals. It's very, very practical. J I Packer writes, "The essence of Christian service is loyalty to the King expressing itself in care for His servants."

Let me ask you, when was the last time you actively cared for someone in need in the church? When's the last time you made a hospital visit? When's the last time you attended the funeral of a family that you know is going through hardship and trouble? When's the last time you visited someone who's physically unable to come to church because of their age or health? When's the last time you took a meal to someone who was unable because of surgery or other circumstances just to prepare their own? When did you offer to cut the grass of someone who was physically unable, to watch their house, and pick up the paper when they had to leave because of a family emergency? To keep the kids so that a young couple that couldn't otherwise afford to would have a little time with each other? I want you to think right now about someone you know who is going through difficult trials, who's in need as we speak and I want to determine how you can serve them very practically this week. That's what this word service means and it's an obligation. So we can actually practice this command by meet caring for the physical needs of others.

But there's a second way we can practice service and it's, we can serve by using our spiritual giftedness in the church. In Ephesians chapter 4, Paul lays down for the Ephesians how the church is to function and he says in verse 11 that Christ gave gifted men to the church and He did it, verse 12, so that these gifted men would "equip the saints," that's you, for "the work of," here it is "service." Your whole role in the church is to serve. And my job and the elders' job is to equip you to serve. And how do you serve?

Well Peter makes it clear in 1 Peter 4:10, he says "As each one of you has received a special spiritual gift, employ it in serving one another." Listen folks, the primary way that God intends for you to serve others is through the spiritual giftedness that He has given to you. Are you active in a ministry of this church? Are you using the spiritual giftedness God has given you? Are you too busy engaged in something else? How can you serve other Christians? Care for their earthly physical needs and serve them in the church by using your giftedness. When we

serve others in these ways, the writer of Hebrews says, “God is not unjust to forget that you have served and are still serving the saints.” That means blessing here doesn’t it? But it also means reward at the judgment.

But there’s something else that I want you to see about service. As we end our study together turn to Luke chapter 12. This is an amazing, amazing reality. Luke chapter 12:37, Jesus is telling us to be ready for His coming. Verse 37 says, “Blessed are those slaves whom the master will find on the alert when he comes;”

Now watch what he says next. “truly I say to you, that he” that is the Master, Jesus Christ, “will gird himself to serve, and have them recline at the table, and will come up and wait on them.” Folks, here’s the amazing thing today we serve one another. There’s coming a time when our Lord Jesus Christ will serve us. Our service here could never earn that. It’s all grace. Just like He served us in the incarnation, you remember the verse we looked at just a few minutes ago. “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many.” That’s what we celebrate in the Lord’s Table; the Lord’s service to us. But we not only can look back and see His service to us by becoming a ransom for many but we can look ahead and see that when He comes amazing grace of amazing grace He will gird Himself and serve us and wait on us. Let’s pray together.

Our Father, we are so grateful for this powerful reminder, this way to preach Your death until You come. Lord thank You for Your sacrifice for our sins. Thank You for Your perfect life that becomes ours by faith that You credit to our account. Thank You for that death that You died as our substitute. That You became sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in You. Father thank You for the great gift of Your Son to us. I pray that You would help us to live for the glory of the cross as we serve and build up one another. We pray it in Jesus’ name, Amen.