

Unity Applied

John 17:20-25

JL-109

Sunday, December 10, 2006

John 17.

conclusion of Jesus' *final*, High-priestly prayer.

Beginning in verse 20, He **prays for the church** –

that is *all of the called-out ones for all time ...*

the *millions upon millions* of **Christians**

whom God **loved from the foundation of the earth**,

men *from every tribe, tongue and nation – Jews and Gentiles –*

who **in one group** are

given to the Son as a gift,

and *to whom* are **given the gift of eternal life**.

These are those who have been

set apart from the world,

sanctified in the truth,

hated by the world *and yet*

sent into the world.

His **dominant concern** in verses 20-25 is for the **unity**

of these *called-out ones*

and for the **display** and **expression** of the **glory** given them.

He prays for them *as if* they **had all been already saved**

as if they are and **already** formed body.

The request is that *this group* is that they **may be one**.

John 17:20-25

When the *human race* fell into **ruin** *due to sin* as it became
alienated from God,
it also became **broken** and **scattered** among *itself*.

God judged His people by **scattering** them ...

He **drove** Adam and Eve from
the **peace and pleasantness** of the garden

He **drove** Cain from his family –
to live a **solitary condemned life**

He **dispersed** the nation of Israel among the heathen nations.

Disunity is a mark of the condemnation of God.

The **ultimate condemnation** being hell,
where there is **NO FELLOWSHIP** ...
where every soul is **isolated** in **utter darkness**
with no one to even look at – for **all eternity**.

Yet, **God makes His desire** for *His people* to be **ONE**
clear time and again throughout the Scripture.

Psa 133:1

*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to
dwell together in unity!*

Paul exhorts the Corinthian church that

*... there be no divisions among you, but you be made
complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.*

Paul's joy is made complete by the Philippian church

*... being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united
in spirit, intent on one purpose.*

The *INDICATIVES* of unity ...
that is that *the church of Jesus Christ* is **already one**
by virtue of our **union with Christ**.

This is not some *whimsical wish* of Jesus that all
professing Christians should **get along together**,

but rather the *effectual fervent prayer* of the Righteous High Priest,

The answer to this prayer does not lie in question, but is
ACCOMPLISHED!

The *oneness* for which *He prays for* has to do with the
very life of God –

The answer to this prayer comes as the **name of Christ**
is **manifested** to *the Given-Ones* -
as our eyes are opened to our **need to be saved**
as men *repent* and **come to Christ**.

As men *come to Christ* in **salvation**,
although faith is individually expressed,
God immediately **incorporates us** into **the Body of Christ**.

Heidelberg Catechism Q. 54:

*I believe that the Son of God, through His Spirit and Word, out
of the entire human race, from the beginning of the world to its
end, gathers, protects, and preserves for himself a **community**
chosen for eternal life and **united** in true faith.*

I Peter 2:10 ... *you were once not a people,*
*but now you are **THE people of God***

There is a *oneness* in Christ's body – a **unity**
that *somehow approximates*
the **essential unity** between *the Father and the Son*.

As He prays that the *oneness of His church* be *AS* ...
that which exists **between *the Father and the Son***.

These words *clearly guard AGAINST*
any kind of *mere outward FORM of unity* ...

The *unity of the Spirit* is *already here* –
its not *something* you have to **drum up**,

but *something* we are to **preserve** – to **hold on to** ...
which is done by *pursuing peace one with another*.

It is not a *unity* that has no regard for truth – but **built upon truth**.

It is not a *unity* without regard to sin, but one **built around holiness**

It is a *unity* of a **common understanding of Scripture**.

And <u>this is the kind of unity</u> that the <u>New Testament addresses</u> , and should be the <i>ONLY unity</i> that we should endeavor to keep .
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What unites us together? What is the glue that binds us together?
What is the basic thing every Christian shares in common?

We said last week how the **secret to true unity** is what is called
indwelling or *union* with Christ.

We share a common life in Christ.

Let me illustrate from the world of human relationships.

I have one brother – Chris LoSardo.

What is it that unites Chris LoSardo with Joe LoSardo?

...

Similarly, every believer is in **union with Christ**,
we **share** the same Heavenly Father
and *since* we all **share His common life**,
we **share that life with each other**

He that is joined to the Lord is One Spirit. 1 Cor 6:17

Everything else we have in common is a **consequence** of this **fundamental spiritual reality**.

I **emphasize this** here at the beginning,
because today we will talk about the **application** of our unity ...

but we need to realize that the **outward display of unity**
means **nothing** *by itself*.

UNITY IS *already* ACHIEVED.

It is **accomplished** – **finished** by Christ!

As Christians who trust *Jesus Christ*,
we are **ALREADY IN UNION** *with Him*

As *Christ and the Father* are **one**, so *we are* **one** with him.
His name is applied to us.
just as the bride takes her groom's name.

We are **one loaf of bread**, **one fellowship**, **one body**, **one vine**.
one building, **one holy priesthood**, **one holy race**,
one temple, **one flock**, **one bride**,

The **Scriptural illustrations** are *several* and *varied*.

And since all **members** of the “*church universal*” are **all** *likewise*
partakers in Christ,
then *the church will be one*,
AS the Father and Son are one.

So the **prayer of Jesus** is **ANSWERED** *in that we are all one*,
in our *like, precious faith*,
which **binds us together in a spiritually organic union**,

which then becomes the **BASIS** of our **practical common fellowship**.

I cannot emphasize this enough,

As you listen to the **imperatives** – you’re going to hear the law.

Don’t fall into the *OT way of thinking* “**Do and live.**”

it is rather

Live and do ...

As always in the Word of God, imperatives follow indicatives.

We do not discover *who we are in Christ*

and have it **come to naught** *in our lives,*

but rather

all that we **ARE** *plays out* in what we **DO**.

The fact that Jesus prays for something - future,

... That they all may be one

indicates that it is not only the **mystical union**

that *Christ has in mind*, but rather that *His own would*,

as they are progressively sanctified in the Truth,

continue to grow to a more perfect oneness.

He’s praying for something TO BE manifested ...

Let’s look at our text John 17:21

That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

And John 17:23

I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.

Address something that may be **confusing** in the text here ...

As *some have gone as far to say* that **church unity** is the very means that **God uses** to bring people to saving faith.

"That the world may believe that thou hast sent me."

It should be noted that Christ *did not* pray that the **result** of the **manifested unity** of His people should be that "the world may believe in me," but ***"that the world may believe that thou hast sent me."***

These two things are **widely different**.

Context dictates that "***the world***" here means:

the world of the ungodly.

Calvin writes: Some explain the word *world* to mean *the elect*; but since the word *world*, throughout the whole chapter, denotes the reprobate, I am more inclined to adopt a different opinion. It happens that, *immediately afterwards*, he draws a distinction between all his people and the same *world* which he now mentions.

Now we **know** that **unregenerate men** are **never** brought to believe in Christ by any external displays of human goodness—

Even the miracles wrought by Christ did not **cause men to trust Him for salvation**.

Though there was *some* **expression** of belief, it was **not** the **enduring faith** of Jesus Christ.

Nothing but the ***Word applied by the Spirit*** ever quickened sinners into **newness of life**.

So this **display** of **Christian unity** awakens people, not necessarily unto salvation,

but to the truth that **Christ is real**,
that **He is from God**.

Disunity in the church, *particularly as a result of*
those who teach aberrant doctrines,
gives **REASON** for *the world*
to instead mock the church.

But the display of *true Christian unity*,
and **the good works** that Christ's church does together,
our *love one for another*
our *mutual care* for one another
our *compassion, mercy and benevolence*

while it does not save, IT **DOES** glorify God.

And leaves the world with **no excuse** ...
though they may not place their trust in Christ,
though they still may hate the church,
they nevertheless, **come to recognition**
that **it must be true** – even though they reject it.

This is how it will be in eternity,
every man who has ever rejected Jesus Christ,
will nevertheless, bow before Him and acknowledge Him,
even though that acknowledgment will not be saving ...

Philp 2:9-11

While *the elect currently alive* are **members** of *the body of Christ*
We cannot exactly say, that there is a *universal church today*?

That is ...
is there is no *universal ASSEMBLY* of the *called-out ones*

There is no *GATHERING* of the “*universal church*”

We said that **only in heaven** will we find the **full number**
of *the elect assembled* ... where ... (Revelation 7:9-10)

And this *will be* the **final consummation**
and **final answer to this prayer of Jesus!**

When God's elect have **all been gathered** together in one,
that is the *final* and *full* answer ...

when they shall be **made perfect** in one

*"When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye
also appear with him in glory"* (Col. 3:4);

then *"he shall come to be glorified in his saints and admired in all
them that believe ... in that day"* (2 Thess. 1:10).

But what about now?

John Angell James writes:

*Fellowship is designed to exhibit upon a smaller scale that
sublime and glorious union and communion which exist, not
only between all real Christians of every country, name, and
age—but between the whole redeemed church and their Divine
Head.*

*The church universal will ever remain the one grand monument
on which are recorded the praises of the living God.*

*Of this general assembly every particular society
is the miniature resemblance.*

*By its public worship, its beautiful subordination,
its mutual affection, its truth, its holiness, its peace,
it is an exhibition to the world of that fellowship which
has God in Christ for its head,
all believers for its members,
heaven for its temple, and
eternity for its duration;*

*while every time it assembles for worship, it shows forth the
unity of the church, and the communion of saints.*

The church is not only "invisible"

if it were, HOW then is a **DISPLAY** of glory
so that *the world* might see it?

If Jesus' prayer is being answered, and we believe it is,

then WHAT WHERE WHEN HOW

is the **expression** of this glory given to the church?

Unity, though *invisible* IS *something* that is **manifest** to the world specifically in our **fellowship** *one with another*.

Twice we see repeated the words,
that the world may believe ...
that the world may know,

Unity is an *invisible* work of God's Holy Spirit
but is to be **made visible by the church**
in works of *compassion* and *love*

Shaun Casey – nice guy

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify God!

Like good works,

Unity in action *glorifies Christ*,
and it is for **this reason** that I am **compelled** today
to **consider the matter** of the **New Testament imperatives**
concerning **unity**.

Because in the **abundance** of **NT commands**
to *love, serve, pray for, encourage, exhort, ...*
one another ...

we are to be a **display** of the *glory*
which **Christ has given us**.

Jesus said that it is *by our love one for another that the world will know that we are His*.

Today I want to **consider the question** of:

*HOW IS this **unity**, that we know exists **invisibly** among the elect made **manifest** to the world?*

HOW and WHERE is this **glory** specifically **displayed**?

It is **most widely presumed** that in John 17,
the **answer** to Jesus' request is that *all kinds of Christians*
from *all kinds of churches* **should be unified** –

that He **prays** for the **unity** of the universal church.

In light of the plethora of the commands in the *New Testament*
that can **only be fulfilled** by the local fellowship of believers

I believe that the **answer** to this prayer for **unity**
is **PRIMARILY expressed**,
not in *the church all over the world*,
but rather **right here** in your local assembly.

I expect that what I am going to share with you from God's Word –
the **IMPERATIVES of unity** – will **not be comfortable**.

We live in an age today of **rampant individualism**.

Church marketing cater to individuals ...
individualism stresses the **interests** of the individual
over that of the assembly.

We are all affected in some capacity by **individualism**,
particularly in America, where **individualism** is considered a virtue

Theologically, **individualism** has its roots in the pietist and revivalist
movements of **19th century fundamentalism**.

This was when the emphasis of the gospel *became*
one's personal decision ...
much was made of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Becoming a Christian, **no longer meant** *joining a church* ...

Biblically, when one was saved,
it is synonymous to their being added to the church –

But our **rebellious individualistic age** says – NO!

I can do this on my own.

To quote Paul Simon ... *I am a rock, I am an island!*

Such a philosophy is a product of rebellious individualism.

It is **rebellious individualism** that seeks to
divorce the church from its history.

that has **scant regard** for the church's great creeds and confessions.

that presumes that this generation **knows better** than
the *previous generations* and
can figure out afresh what the church is **supposed to be**,
without consideration of our **history**.

It is this *same* **individualism** that is **resistant to church discipline** ...
that says, "*if you discipline me, I'll just go to another church*"

It is **rebellious individualism** that says,
*"I can't find a church that I can agree with,
so I'm going to start my own."*

that today has given rise to the free-lance approach to **ministry**,
ministers receiving ordinations on line
apart from a local church.

that gives rise to the *plethora* of today's **para church organizations** –
that supposedly **minister to the body of Christ**,
apart from the local church.

they steal from the <i>local church</i> in <u>time</u> , <u>resources</u> and <u>finances</u> !

I am **compelled** to address this matter today,
because **the church** is God's idea –
the **church** is the outworking of God's eternal plan.

It is the **church** *through which* God **accomplishes**
His **plan in the world.**

The **church** is the context in which God
sanctifies those born into His family.

It is **nothing more** than **rebellious individualism** that says,
*I'm going to dismiss that which has
occupied the mind and heart of God from eternity past!*

It is the **church** that is the **heavenly gift**
of the Father to the Son.

Be sure that **the Father** will only give that which is **precious**
to His beloved Son.

How precious is the church - you ask?
It demanded the **highest price ever paid**
Acts 20:28 says that *Jesus purchased the church with His own blood.*

Can we be **casual** or **indifferent** toward that
which **cost our Savior His life?**

The **church** is *God's most precious possession ...*
we should be **ashamed** at how we fail to consider it –
how we **neglect it** – **take it for granted** –

In Eph 5:29 we learn that **Christ *nourishes and cherishes the church.***

Shall we not take our lead from Him?
Shall we not seek to nourish and cherish the church as well?

This is **near to God's heart** - people!

He calls us ***His people.***
I shall be your God and you shall be my people

You **belong** to God.
He has **chosen you** – you are **His possession** –
he set **His affection** upon you.

Deu 7:6-8

For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of slavery ...

You are a people, a nation, a priesthood (1 Pet 2:9)

1 Tim 3:15 refers to you as the household of God.

1 Pet 5 calls us *a flock* ...

These **illustrations** are to **reinforce** and **enlarge** the **idea** that the **Christian life** is designed by God to be **lived in community**.

In 1 Cor 3:9, we are all likened to a building.

Each of us are *living stones* – carefully chiseled by the Master builder

Eph 2:21-22

in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

Probably the most **distinctive metaphor** – *particularly by Paul* – for **God's people** - found throughout the epistles – in Romans, 1 Cor, Eph, Col – is that of a body ...

Rom 12:4-5

For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.

This **metaphor stresses** the *interconnectedness*;
the *dependence* of **every believer upon every other** believer ...
this is most explicitly described in 1 Cor 12.

1 Cor 12:12-27

27 Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.

I cannot exposit the **entire passage** now – but let me **draw a few applications out ...**

1) One cannot **boast** about their gifting ...
we only have that which we receive as a gift of God's grace.

If I say, that *as the pastor*, I am the **most important part**
of this church, **that is sin!**

There is one head of the church, Jesus Christ.
He has *graciously* **chosen** to **use Bill and myself each week**
to *get out the basin and towel* and **wash you with the Word** –
but that is it.

You guys who think **teaching is everything** – **that is sin!**

Its no different than the Corinthians who were *of Paul* or *Apollos* or
Peter ... today we have personality sects –
I'm of John MacArthur, I'm of Al Martin, I'm of R.C. Sproul ...
that is **outright sin!**

***Has Christ been divided? MacArthur was not crucified for
you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Sproul?***

Are we not all of Christ alone?

And the teacher is just supposed to be a foot-washer anyway!
And we glorify the men ...

God is jealous God – He will not share His glory with another!

- 2) The second practical inference from 1 Cor 12 that **we draw** is that **each member** of the body ought to be **content** *in his or her role*.

It is **sinful** to covet **another person's gift** in the church.

- 3) In seeming humility one may say,
“*My gift of serving is not that important – I have nothing to offer compared to others – so why participate at all.*”

But that attitude does not reflect humility –
in fact it is an **affront to God's wisdom** –
it is **self-centered** and **self-seeking** –

it says that God was not wise and **loving**
when he gave me my gift of service or helping
and not teaching or pastoring.

- 4) **the gifts of each member are determined by the Lord.**

Each member occupies the **position** that God has determined
to assign him, and that which is most **conducive to the whole**.

- 5) **the least attractive gift is most important.**

We think: *if only we could have the public eye and ear ...*
surely *that* is **most important** ...
and so, we **ignore God** in the *small places* –
we **ignore Him** in the *prisons* – in *the shelters* – in *the hospitals*
out on the streets ...
... he said
as much as you do it to the least of these my brethren,
you've done it to me.

- 6) Also, God has so ordered things such that
no one receives all of the gifts and that
no single gift is given to everyone.

We should not *therefore* expect that **everyone be like us**
... If **everyone possessed the same gifts**
we **wouldn't need each other** ...

I find that **often** when **Christians disagree** it is because
they are not appreciating the other's *gifting*.

God **distributes** these gifts *sovereignly*,
*that is the Holy Spirit **decides** what gift you will get –*
in order that we will **depend upon each other**.

To the degree that you **minister your gift**,
your church is going to be **stronger or weaker**.

When you fail to exercise your gift you **force other members**
of *your family* into **double and triple duty**
to make up for **your slothfulness**.

7) Which brings me to the final point of application from 1 Cor. 12
the mutual dependence that **members of the church**
have for one another.

If we fail to think of our **Christian life in corporate terms**,
we **damage the body** ...
if we **isolate ourselves** from the body,
we **do damage** not only to *ourselves*, but to **each other**.

When one member hurts, the whole body hurts.
You may not think so, because when you hurt,
you *think you're the only one who cares* ... **but not so.**

If we pursue our own **personal gratification**,
or we nurse our own **little resentments** *toward one another*,
or we have our **little pity parties**,
and **hurt feelings** ...
when we **speak harshly to another**,
or are **unkind**, to *another person*,

We are **breaking up a household**,
separating a flock,
busting up a temple,
beating a bride ...
we are **inflicting wounds on Christ's body!**

May God grant us **repentance**
that we might see the **beauty of the church** and
God's glorious plans for His people.

Contention is **sinful** and
discord compromises our corporate witness.

That is why Paul exhorted ...

Let there be no divisions among you.

Be diligent to preserve the unity which is the bond of peace.

Discord grieves the Spirit of God –

it's a **demonstration** of *immaturity* and *pride* –
it **hinders corporate growth** and **mutual sanctification**.

It is **contrary** to *the attitude of humility which was in Christ Jesus*,
and so **contention aligns us with Satan's work of accuser**.

The *key* to **harmonious body life** is
mutual love for and **delight in**
the Head of the body, Jesus Christ,
and **the gospel** (**what He has done for us sinners**)

This is *invisible* ...

But while the **bonds** that **unite us** are *invisible*,
they are **clearly manifested** in *our behavior toward one another*.

So much so that Jesus prayed in John 17 that the **display of this unity** would be such *that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me* (17:23).

This was the testimony of the *early church* ... turn to Acts 2.

Act 2:41-47

Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

Take note ... **all 3,000** were *steadfast* ...
not *only* in the apostle's doctrine, but *in fellowship,*
breaking of bread and prayer.

We cannot pick and choose the aspects of church life
which we **like** and that which we **do not**.

We can be *steadfast* in **bringing forth the Word of God**,
in our celebration of the Lord's Supper every Lord's day –
even in our attendance at prayer meetings ...

but if we neglect fellowship, there is **something missing** ...
they were *steadfast* in all of these!

And look at the results:

And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.

And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

As **all** of the members were *steadfast in* and *continually devoting themselves to these things, continuing with one mind,*

the result was:

favor with all people, and the Lord adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

*How do we **diligently guard that unity?***

Well, **unity** is *first based upon God's work of sanctification in the truth.*

The only place where there can be **true unity** is a **place** where **all** the people **understand** the Word of God.

Where the Scripture is **not taught** with **precision** and **care,**
there is **no way** that people are going to *think the same* and *make the same judgment on issues.*

One of the great blessings of a church that has **clear teaching** and **doctrine,** is that it will **get a legacy of unity.**

Sound doctrine is the *first step* on the path to **holiness** and **unity.**

But this being said, a **church** that **adheres strictly** to **theological orthodoxy** while **neglecting** to **obey** the New Testament admonition to *love one another, practically and really* in **works of compassion and mercy,** **fails** to be a **display of the glory** of its *supposed unity.*

Love for the truth should **not exist** in **isolation** from *love for people,*

It is where a *working and abiding fellowship of the saints* **exists** in the context of **sound doctrine** that **God's glory** is **visible.**

The **ultimate purpose** and **design** of the body and therefore our **service toward one another** is that **God be glorified!**

God's design is that He be honored through the exercise of our love one for another ... and to the degree that we neglect this – we become like clouds blocking the sun – we obscure the glory of God among us.

of course we cannot add one iota to God's eternal glory, but we can display it in varying degrees ... as we are changed into the image of Christ, we display that glory individually, and as we unify as a body, we display that glory corporately.

these duties that we have and gifts we use are performed not in theory but in real life, with real relationships, in real ministry with real flesh and blood people!

Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and in truth (1 Jn 3:18)

Some are weak, some are strong, some are gentle, some are harsh.
Some are easy to get along with, some are difficult.
Some are well adjusted, some are socially awkward.
Some are high-maintenance people – they may even drain you ...
But you have to bear with them!

Ja 2:8-10

If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law, according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

Do what you have to do until you learn to love that person ... put up with their annoyances, forgive them for the same sin over and over again – invite him to your home even if he repulses you – until we learn to love the impossible person, we will never understand Christ's love for us.

Romans 12:10 admonishes us – **Give preference to one another in honor.** As Robert Haldane observes, *this is the one matter in which Christians may lawfully strive with one another – they are permitted to strive with one another toward mutual respect.*

Rom 12:15-18

Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.

Rom 14:19

So then let us pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.

Rom 15:1

Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves.

Rm 15:7

Wherefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.

Haldane writes, *Christians in general are not sufficiently aware of this duty ... what duty?*

The duty that we have pursue as he says, “*such things as will have a tendency to increase the faith and establishment of each other*”

Philp 2:3-4

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

What are these duties of which I speak?

Is it about attendance requirements at church?

Is it about arriving to service on time?

Is it about attending all stated church functions?

No.

These are external ...

A church can set up a whole bunch of rules to get you to do these things ...

Below the surface there it is simple disobedience to the “allelon” in Greek – or “one-another” precepts of the NT

The phrase “*one another*” appears well over 100 times in the New Testament, nearly 40 times as a commands to behavior to – *serve, accept, be of the same mind with, care for, admonish, bear with, be kind to, encourage, stimulate*, and (repeated over ten times) *to love – one another*.

But rampant, rebellious individualism says, I care more about myself, my comforts, my sleep, my feelings than I do about my brothers and sisters.

I would ask the question ...

Why do we all not leap with enthusiasm out of bed on Sunday morning in anticipation to see our brothers and sisters?

What earthly thing can hold us back from seeing our brothers and sisters whom we love and miss on Wednesday night?

I’d ask you ... maybe you don’t really miss them, maybe there are some you don’t want to see ... if that’s the case, then repent ... you are not being obedient as Rom 12:10 commands to be devoted to one another in brotherly love?

We’ve seen in Romans, being devoted to one another, giving preference to one another, being of the same mind toward one another, building up one another, accepting one another ... what else?

We can’t read them all ...

But look at Rom 16:16.

Surely this is something we all can do ...

Greet one another with a holy kiss.

The kiss is the near eastern mode of salutation – akin to our handshake in the west. But it is holy ... that is it is no merely an outward expressed greeting, but an expression of the peculiar love that Christians have for one another.

Justin Martyr records that in the early church, this command was practiced just before the celebration of the Lord's supper.

You would think that every Christian should be capable of at least doing this.

Yet there are many who simply enter, take their seat, speak to no one – seemingly incapable to take the initiative to extend a most basic courtesy – a warm greeting!

Gal 5:13

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

The root word “serve” is the same word for slave “doulos.”
Serve as if you were one another's slaves – but not out of obligation, but out of love.

Are you here to serve or to be served?

Eph 4:32

And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

Simply put, to be unkind to others is to show that you have forgotten God's kindness to you in Christ.

What about Hebrews 10:24

Hbr 10:24

And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works:

Are you doing this?

Are you encouraging one another to read the Scripture?

Holding one another accountable in matters of life and godliness?
Calling when you don't see each other ... picking up those who are down ...
saying "I'll be looking for you on Sunday!"

I hope if nothing else that you are getting an understanding from this, what the perceptive part of the Word does ... how the law brings conviction ... you will note how all of these commands come from the latter portions of the epistles ... because they can only be understood in light our union with Christ – as you are convicted, don't forget that you can't do any of this on your own.

1 Pet 4:9

Be hospitable to one another without complaint.

Hospitality is commended in Rom 12:13 and Hebrews 13:2.
This grace is actually required of church elders in 1 Tim and Titus ...
So it is no small matter.

Unfortunately the threshold of many Christian homes will never be crossed by the feet of the saints. Some tables will sadly never be set in anticipation of serving a meal to a visiting missionary.

As we exercise this grace of hospitality, we are acknowledging that our home is a stewardship from God to be used refresh His people.

What better model of Christian unity can we display to our children than having brothers and sisters in Christ over our homes for fellowship.

And lastly let's consider James 5:16.

...pray for one another,

Our giving out of the prayer lists is not some technique – its not an exercise, but it so that you might fulfill this command.

Pray – genuinely pray – pray for individuals – pray for Bill and myself.
Pray for one another really – don't just say, "I'll keep that in prayer for you brother" and then forget ... PRAY!

There we have it.
God's one-another precepts.

These are our mutual obligations to one another – none are exempt.

We have been commanded in very clear terms, to the performance of certain duties. If the law has done its job, we may be bordering on the brink of condemnation on the account of our miserable failure to love one another in these ways. We may be thinking, how can I ever perform what is demanded – it is impossible. If you are feeling that weight of condemnation, it is because the law has been rightly preached – you're supposed to.

Yes, we are bound to love one another.

Yes we are commanded to forgive one another

To accept one another

To kind to one another ... just as Christ loved, forgave, accepted and demonstrated kindness to us leading to our repentance.

Yes we are obliged to pray for one another – just as Christ ever lives to make intercession for us.

But realize, beloved that Christ did all things well, not to be our example, but to be our substitute.

We must apply ourselves diligently to obey these precepts, but we do so not under threat of condemnation, but with joy because our faithful representative, Jesus Christ has already performed all of these duties in our stead!

So, as you receive the bread and wine this morning, consider the One who did for you all that is required of you.

And as you do, the glory of this truth should prompt us to clothe ourselves in humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

Whatever you do in this church, you pursue unity – pursue harmony.

It is God's gift entrusted to us – let us not neglect it or take it for granted. Pray for it, protect it, be grateful for it, cherish it!

Pursue opportunities to love, which is the perfect bond of unity ...

to show compassion, sensitivity, humility, patience, bearing with one another, praying for each other, forgiving each other ...

Put on love!

Ep 4:2-3

with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Then we will know the extraordinary pleasantness of the promise of God as He is pleased to turn His face toward us and prosper us.

That our church would become an oasis of rest from the battle.
That our fellowship be a refreshing spring
A place of delight for the thirsty soul

That there be a vibrant gladness in our corporate worship ...
That we might say with full exuberance.

I was glad when they said to me, let us go to the house of the Lord!

And that we would genuinely enjoy the company of each other as we live out our faith together in an atmosphere of peace to the glory of God.

That the world may know that we are the object of God's love who loved us as He loved His son.

Amen.