

The Household of God

What is a Church? Part 10

Romans 15:5-7

Summary: As God's household (family) we must relate to God as Father (honoring Him through submission to and gratitude for His plan), asking for grace from Him, and trusting Him to love us as a father. And we must relate to one another with unity (same attitude, goal, and purpose) so our praise will be unified, and with love – reconciled relationship and every-deepening fondness and affection for one another.

Introduction

Have you ever had the chance to meet one of your heroes – some famous person you really admire? Two of my heroes are John MacArthur and John Piper. God has delivered to me so much of His kindness and goodness and grace through those two men, that I have a great affection for them. A few years ago one of the great thrills of my life came when I got to sit in John MacArthur's living room and interact with him face to face. And then more recently – just this year I visited John Piper's church, and to my amazement he invited me over to his house for lunch with his family on a Sunday after church. He didn't know me from Adam, but he is just a very gracious, hospitable man. If you want to know what that was like for me, just imagine the person you most admire in this world and imagine being invited by that person personally into his home for a meal.

Now imagine this – imagine some world-famous person, a president or a great king; imagine you looked up to this person and loved him more than anyone in the world, and that person contacted you and invited you into his home - not for lunch, but as a permanent member of the household. He adopted you as a son.

Both MacArthur and Piper were very gracious and very kind to me, but neither one of them offered to adopt me. When evening came I had to go, and the door closed behind me as I left. But God has brought us, the Church, right into His living room and has made us His permanent family. I hope that hits you with powerful force.

When we launched this church in February of this year we decided that our very first series would be a study of what the Bible says a church is supposed to be. So we have been examining the five primary metaphors Scripture gives for a church. So far we have covered the first four – the body of Christ, the bride of Christ, the Temple of the Holy Spirit, and a Holy Priesthood. Today we come to the final metaphor in our study – the household of God. That same metaphor was used in the Old Testament to refer to the saints when they were gathered together (Psalm 122:9), and it carries into the New Testament. We find that term used to describe the Church in about a half dozen passages.¹

Eph.2:19 So then you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God's household

It is a big deal to be a member of God's household. According to 1 Timothy 3:15 the whole reason for writing the book of 1 Timothy was so that we would know how we are to behave ourselves in God's household.

The meaning of “household”

¹ Eph.2:19, 1 Tim.3:15, 1 Pe.4:17, Heb.3:2,6, 10:21,

The word “household” refers mainly to the people who live in your house. So by using this metaphor God is showing us that the Church is God’s family. That means we are related to Him in a certain way and we are related to one another in a certain way. With God we have a father-children relationship. And with one another we have sibling relationships – we are brothers and sisters.

Relating to God as Father

The concept of the universal fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of man is not a biblical idea. Non Christians are not the children of God. Not even the Old Testament saints related to God as father. David had about as close and intimate a relationship with God as an Old Testament saint could have, and yet you see him calling God His King, Master, Savior, Lord, Shepherd – but never Father.

The promise of God relating to a man as father was given to David. But David would not be that man. It would be one of David’s decedents.

2 Sam.7:12-14 I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, ...¹³ ... I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴ I will be his father, and he will be my son.

That is a promise of the Messiah. In Old Testament times the people of God, no matter how godly they were or how much they walked with God, were not the sons and daughters of God. The only son of God was the promised Messiah. Psalm two is a psalm about the great king who would come from the line of David. In verse seven that king is talking:

**Ps.2:7 [God] said to me, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father.
12 Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.**

And the promise that God would be a father to man, and that man would be God’s Son, was such an astonishing promise that the writer of Hebrews takes it as proof that Jesus was God. (Hebrews 1:5,6) Only the Son of God Himself can call God Father. And yet, amazingly, we can call God Father! We can do that only because we are in Christ. We can call God Father because we have the exact same status before God as His own Son does, because we are in Christ. “In Christ” means that God has placed us in such close relationship with Jesus Christ that we have the exact same standing before God that Jesus has. And God loves us with the same love with which He loves Jesus.

So when we talk about the Church as the household of God and about God as our Father, don’t take that lightly. That is a really big deal. 1 John 3:1 is an exclamation:

1 John 3:1 Behold! how great a love the Father has given us, that we should be called God's children. And we are!

We need to take our role as His daughters and sons very seriously if we are going to function as a legitimate church in God’s eyes. So how is that done? How do we take it seriously when we come together as a church? What exactly are our responsibilities as God’s children?

Our Responsibilities as Children

We could spend weeks exploring that, but let me just quickly mention three things that really stand out.

1) Honor

The most fundamental responsibility a child has toward his father is to honor him. That is the most basic duty of a child: “Honor your father and mother.” Just as marriage exemplifies the relationship

between Christ and the Church, so does fatherhood.

Heb.12:9 Furthermore, we had natural fathers discipline us, and we respected them. Shouldn't we submit even more to the Father of spirits and live?

The relationship of children to their fathers illustrates the relationship of the Church to God. So we should revere God with the utmost honor and respect – and even fear.

1 Pe.1:17 if you address as Father the One who judges impartially based on each one's work, you are to conduct yourselves in fear during this time of temporary residence.

If you are a child, the most obvious expression of honor toward your father is obedience. That is why in Ephesians five “Honor your father and mother” and “Children obey your parents” are equated as one command. They are not two separate things; the most basic way you express honor for your father is by respectfully obeying him. Relating to God as father means we, as a church must be obedient to Him.

Obviously that means obeying His Word. A church that elevates tradition or human wisdom or books or denomination or anything else above God’s Word is an unfaithful church and is in serious trouble. Obeying God’s Word is crucial. But that is not the only kind of obedience there is. Most of the time when the New Testament talks about obeying God the *Father* specifically, the emphasis is on submission to His sovereign plan – providence. God the Father controls all things,² and so the measure of our submission to Him is seen in how we respond to the events that take place in our lives. When we reject those events by complaining or grumbling or through discontent - or we reject His plan in advance by worrying, we are not being submissive to God’s perfect plan.

And the most important indicator of whether you are submitting to that plan is gratitude. God’s plan is not just a plan – it is a good plan. Psalm 33:10 calls it the plan of God’s heart. He loves that plan because it reflects His very heart, which means we should love that plan. Submission to God’s plan means not just accepting it, but accepting it as a wonderfully good thing. And you know you are doing that when you feel gratitude.

This is why gratitude is almost always directed to the Father in Scripture. I counted over 40 times in the New Testament when thanksgiving is mentioned, and in all but two it is the Father who is thanked.³

Eph.5:20 giving thanks always for everything to God the Father

**Col.1:3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you,
¹² giving thanks to the Father**

That is not to say it is wrong to give thanks to Jesus. It is only to point out that part of relating to God as Father means submitting to and joyfully accepting His perfect, sovereign plan as good, and it is the Father that Scripture consistently points to as being the Author of that perfect plan.

So what does it mean to function as the family of God? It means looking to God as Father, and that

² God the Father controls all things – all events, all actions, everything that everyone does – everything that happens. He is in no way the author of sin or any kind of evil, but does maintain total sovereign control over everything.

Isa.46:10-11 I declare the end from the beginning, and from long ago what is not yet done, saying: My plan will take place, and I will do all that I please. 11 ...What I have spoken, that will I also bring it about. What I have said, that will I do.

Ps.33:11 the plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations.

Ps.135:6 The LORD does whatever He pleases in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all the depths.

Pr.19:21 Many plans are in a man's heart, but the LORD's decree will prevail

Dan.4:35 He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?"

Acts 17:26 he determined the times set for them and the exact places where [every person] should live.

Eph.1:11 In Him we were also made His inheritance, predestined according to the purpose of the One who works out everything in agreement with the decision of His will

Pr.16:33 The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.

Pr.21:1 The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases.

³ One of the 10 lepers in Lk.17 thanked Jesus, and Paul thanked Him for his calling

begins with honor. We honor Him as Father by submitting to His will, which means obeying Him in reverent fear, and joyfully and accepting His plan with gratitude.

2) Ask

The second part of relating to God as father is asking. Children look to their father for provision, protection, guidance and care. This is the aspect of our relationship with Him in which we call Him “Abba” Father (Abba is a term like “daddy”).

Ro.8:15 you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father!"

Notice the words “cry out.” The picture is not that you are sitting up on His lap talking to Him. The picture is of a very small child who is in real trouble and starts screaming for his daddy. We cry out to Him to take care of us and protect us and provide for us. We cry out for Him to rescue us against bullies and dangers. He is pleased when we do that. “Daddy, *please*, help me!”

My daughters are teenagers now, but they still call me “daddy.” I *love* that. I love it because it makes me feel like they still look at me in the way a little child looks to her father, her only protector and guide and teacher and caretaker and leader. God likes to be called that too. In times of distress or fear or pain He wants us to *cry* out to Him – “Daddy!”

Jesus did that. The night before the crucifixion when Jesus was sweating drops of blood.

Mk.14:36 He said, "Abba, Father! All things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me."

And again, it is only because we are in Christ that we can say that.

Gal.4:6 because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba, Father!"

If we are going to fulfill our responsibility as God’s family – His household - we are going to have to be a church devoted to prayer – a church characterized not only by thanksgiving, but by asking for things. And the number one thing we see being asked for in the Bible from God the Father is grace.

The word “grace” summarizes all the benefits that are experienced from being in God’s presence and enjoying fellowship with Him. When He is near you in a favorable way you get things like peace, joy, comfort, rest, love, understanding and insight, a clean conscience, power, enablement, etc. And if you sum all that up in one word you get “grace.”

God is glorified when you ask Him for grace. He is glorified because He is shown to be the source of grace. If you want to show how wonderful a buffet is, you do that not by bringing a bologna sandwich and putting it out on one of the islands; you do it by showing up hungry and feasting. If you want to show how great a mechanic is you do that by bringing him a really messed up car. If you want to put on display how generous someone is you do that by showing up with a massive financial need. If you want to demonstrate how powerful a winch is you do it by getting your Jeep really, really stuck. If you want to show God to be the wonderful, satisfying spring of living water that He is, ask Him for grace. My goal is to make it so all my prayers are just different ways of saying, “God, I want to experience Your presence more and to receive more of Your grace.”⁴

So what is our role in this household? We are the children, which means our job is to *honor* God by joyfully accepting and being thankful for the outworking of His sovereign plan in all that happens, and we are to ask Him to provide for us and to give us grace.

⁴ The more we ask of God the more glorified He is – *if we ask the right way*. Not all asking glorifies Him. He is not glorified by the kind of asking we see in James 4:1-4, where they ask just so they can spend what they get on earthly things. God is only glorified by our asking when we ask Him for grace - when we ask for the benefits of being in His presence, whatever form those benefits may take. My goal is to never ask God for anything besides grace. So if I decide to ask Him for a new car, I want to desire that car only as an expression of His grace and favor - not because I am focused on the car itself. That way, when God answers my prayer and gives me grace, I am happy and I am satisfied whether the grace comes in the form of the new car or whether it comes in some other form, like contentment with my old car, or heightened interest in spiritual things so that I lose interest in cars, or trials and suffering that teach me perseverance, or whatever. When we desire something, we are holding up that thing we desire as being desirable. So if my desire terminates on a car – so that the car is the ultimate object of my desire, then when I ask for that car all I am doing is glorifying that car as being desirable. You glorify whatever it is you desire.

3) Trust

And one more way that children relate to their fathers is trust. Most of the time when we read about faith in the New Testament the object of that faith is Jesus. When God the Father is the object of faith in the New Testament, the emphasis is usually on trusting Him in one specific way - trusting Him to love us as a father. When the Trinity is spoken of in Scripture that which is emphasized about the Father is love. God wants us to think of His love for us mainly in terms of the way a father loves his little ones.

Mt.7:9-11 "Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? 11 If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!"

When we think about how God thinks and feels when we have a need, God wants us to think in terms of the way a loving father feels toward his little child. He wants you to trust Him to love you that way, with that kind of attitude and those kinds of feelings. When you have a crisis and are in distress, God wants you to think of Him as being like a human father feels when he sees that his little two-year-old's fingers have been slammed in a door and the child is screaming in pain.

If Agape is going to be what God wants a church to be, we are going to have to be a group of people who take our role as children in this household very seriously. We must be a people who honor, obey and thank God as Father, ask for grace from God our Father, and trust Him to love us as a father.

Now let's consider what it means for us to be siblings in this household.

Relating to one another as siblings

To say that God's fatherhood over us implies our brotherhood with one another is not just a logical deduction. It is stated explicitly in Scripture as an important ramification of being part of God's household. And the passages that point that out emphasize two main responsibilities we have as siblings: love and unity. Romans 15:6, for example, speaks of how we can glorify God the Father.

Ro.15:5-7 Now may the God of endurance and encouragement⁵ grant you agreement with one another, according to Christ Jesus, ⁶ so that you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ with a united mind and voice. ⁷ Therefore accept one another, just as the Messiah also accepted you, to the glory of God

Unity

We glorify the Father when we have agreement with one another with a unified mind and voice. That is unity. Then he says, in verse seven **Therefore accept one another... to the glory of God, that is love.**

The term **agreement** in verse five (NIV says **spirit of unity**) means "to think the same thing." And the word "according to" (*kata*) has the force here of "conforming to the norm or governing standard." In the Greek it sounds like this: *May the God of all endurance and encouragement give you to think the same thing with one another conforming to [the governing standard of] Christ Jesus.*"

The fact that Paul says this at the beginning of chapter 15, right after writing chapter 14 is very significant because chapter 14 is all about how to handle all our differences of opinion. And the way to

⁵ God is called the God of endurance and encouragement, meaning He is the God who provides those things. He supplies you with endurance – the ability to persevere through hardship and trouble. And He provides encouragement. The word translated encouragement is *parakaleo*. That is a wonderful word. It has a broad range of meaning. When it appears in the context of sorrow it means "to comfort or console." When it appears in the context of unrepentant sin it means giving respectful rebuke or a call to repentance. When it appears in the context of weariness or exasperation it means to give refreshment and rest. When it appears in the context of timidity it means to impart strength and to motivate. So when Paul calls God the God of all *parakaleo* he is pointing to the fact that God is the kind of father who comes along side you and gives you what you need the most. He does not give you a pep talk when what you really need is soothing, comforting, tenderness. He does not give you soothing tenderness when what you needs is rebuke. And He does not give you rebuke when what you really need is strengthening and motivation. He is the God of all *parakaleo*, which means He comes along side you and gives you the kind of encouragement you really need. That is the kind of God we are talking about, and Paul says, "May that God give you agreement."

handle it is this: if it is a debatable issue, don't look down on each other or fight over your differences. But do stick with what you believe.

Ro.14:5 One person considers one day to be above another day. Someone else considers every day to be the same. Each one must be fully convinced in his own mind.

So Paul had just explained to them that it is okay that some of them take the "special day" view and the others take the "no special day" view. It is okay that some take the "abstain from meat" view and others take the "chow down" view. It is okay to have those kinds of differences in the Church. It is by God's design that the church is made up of both weak and strong Christians.

Now he is saying, "It is okay that you have these different views, and that you are fully convinced of your opposing views - just make sure you all think the same thing." So, clearly, thinking the same thing does not mean having all the same views on everything. What it means is that we are to have a unified attitude and purpose and direction, even in the midst of all our differences. We have the same heartbeat and the same passion and we are on the same side. And that attitude must conform to the standard of Jesus Christ's attitude and purpose and direction.

So what is Christ's attitude, purpose and direction? All you have to do is look back at chapter 14. Christ's attitude, purpose, and direction in chapter 14 is that He wants unity among His people. And He wants it so bad He died to bring it about. And one of the reasons He wants that unity so much is because of His love for every person in the church.

Ro.14:4 Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

This person you are judging and condemning – while you are busy condemning him and opposing him Jesus is busy working to make sure he will stand on the Judgment Day. So in opposing and condemning that person you are doing the exact opposite of what Jesus is doing.

⁹ For this very reason, Christ died ... ¹⁰ You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother?

¹⁵ If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died.

¹⁸ anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God

Serves Christ in what way? The way of giving up your preferences for the benefit of your brother or sister. That is the key – giving up your preferences for your brothers. And that is how Paul summarizes chapter 14.

Ro.15:1-2 We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. ² Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. ³ For even Christ did not please himself

Christ is our example. He willingly gave up His own personal comfort for the benefit of the Church. So now when we get to verse five and read... **Now may the God of endurance and encouragement grant you agreement with one another, according to [the standard of] Christ Jesus...** we understand what he is saying. God is a God who is busy providing endurance and comfort to that Christian that you have hostility against. Jesus Christ is busy building that person up in preparation for Judgment Day. Jesus gave up His life for that person's good. So don't be in opposition to that person.

Think of your least favorite Christian. I have some scary news for you – Jesus is on that person's side. So when you have hostility toward someone in the Church you have hostility toward Christ.

Why is this so important? If there is someone I just can not stand, and he can not stand me, why can't I just leave and go to some other church, and we can each go our separate ways and not aggravate each other anymore? Why do we have to be so unified in heart? The answer is in the next verse. The purpose of this agreement we are to have is...

⁶ so that you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ with a united mind and voice. ⁷ Therefore accept one another, just as the Christ also accepted you, to the glory of God.

We have to have unity so we can praise God with a united voice. If you were on trial and your lawyer gathered a bunch of witnesses to testify in your favor, but every time one of them said something good about you another one jumped up and said, "I object!" – that wouldn't help your cause.

The last group of people we want arguing and fighting with each other is the group that is in charge of singing God's praises in this world. When we are against each other we dishonor God before the world, and we grieve the very one we are trying to worship.

Love

It grieves Him because He loves us all. And here's where we see the connection between unity and love. To be unified we have to love one another. Unity is not just a matter of institutional or doctrinal agreement. It is also a matter of relational oneness. We have to have reconciled relationships with one another. And when we don't, we are not unified and God is grieved.

It is sad when two people you love are at odds with each other. Imagine someone called you on the phone and said, "I want to invite you to a banquet I am giving in your honor. You have made some great accomplishments in your life, and a bunch of us want to honor you, so we've rented the civic center and have sold tickets and the place is going to be packed out. Everyone is going to be there to see when we honor you for what you have done. So be there Saturday night at six o'clock. Wear a tuxedo, and, oh – don't bring your wife. We can't stand her." Now imagine that the person calling is another member of your own household – one of your children.

Are you even going to go? And if you did go, would you enjoy it? No. You're not going to enjoy receiving honor from someone who hates someone you dearly love. That is why Jesus said, if you are offering your gift on the altar, and there you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift. (Matthew 5:23-24)

Hostility between brothers is a stench in heaven and it so utterly contaminates our worship that Jesus gives reconciliation the utmost urgency.

It is ridiculous for any two Christians on this planet not to be able to get along or to carry on ongoing hostility toward each other. If that is happening it is because of unrepentant sin on the part of one or both parties, because God has provided us with the resources to love one another. The only way for us to successfully glorify God is with a united voice. God will answer our prayers and accept our worship and grace us with His presence when we worship Him arm-in-arm, and no other way. If we try and tell God, "Meet me at church on Sunday morning so I can honor You, but don't bring Your wife – don't bring that guy that you deeply love and that you died for but who I can not stand" - if we say that to God we tear the heart out of our own worship.

How much do I have to love them?

Now maybe you are thinking, "Ha, this is a piece of cake. No problem at all. I don't have any hostility toward anyone in the church. I don't hate anyone. I am not opposed to anyone here. I don't even know anyone!"

What does God think about that? Is that what He wants? Is that what He has in mind when He says to have an attitude like that of Jesus? Is that all there is to love – just not being hostile toward anyone?

⁷ Therefore accept one another, just as the Christ also accepted you

The word **accept** is *proslambano* – to receive someone to yourself. It is the word used to describe the act of physically grabbing someone and pulling him close to you. It is the word used to describe Peter pulling Jesus close so he could talk to Him in private. (Matthew 16:22 – see also Acts 18:26) It is even used to describe eating – receiving food into your body. So the English word “accept” is a very weak translation of this word and does not do it justice at all. The command is to pull people in close to you.

It is not enough for us to merely co-exist in the church without fighting. You have the responsibility to grab the people around you and pull them in close – right inside your personal world. Right inside your intimate circle of friendship; into your home; into your living room; up to your dinner table.

If you already have brotherly love for everyone – you already love us like your own family, and that is great, but even that is not enough.

1 Pe.1:22 Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.

You love each other like brothers? Great, you are at the starting point. Now make some progress from there toward loving one another deeply, from the heart.

1 Thes.4:9-10 Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. ¹⁰ ...Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more.

Ro.12:10 Show family affection to one another with brotherly love. Outdo one another in showing honor.

And by the way, I hope you have not bought into the wrong teaching that I bought into for so many years that says love is only an action and does not necessarily involve emotion. That is dead wrong. It is not true of *philos* love, it is not true of *agape* love, it is not true of any kind of love. Where there is genuine love there will be action. But that does not mean action alone is love. Paul said it is possible to give your body up as a martyr and still not have love. Love involves way more than just your actions. It encompasses your affections and attitudes and will and inclinations and emotions and every other part of you.

I have heard some people say, “Love your brothers and sisters in Christ. You don’t have to like them, but you do have to love them. You do not have to be friends with them, but you do have to do what is in their best interests.” But the language of Romans 12:10 won’t allow for that. He uses two words for love – *philadelphia* and *philostorgos*. Both terms refer to family affection – especially *philostorgos*. That is a very emotional term. It speaks of a deep fondness and warm affection.

If the love we are to have for one another does not involve emotion, tell me this – where did all Paul’s tears come from?

Acts 20:19 I served the Lord with great humility and with tears

31 night and day for three years I did not stop warning each one of you with tears.

Paul knew that the time would come when bad leaders would emerge in that church, and when he warned them about that there were tears in his eyes. Where did those tears come from – just an act of the will? Did Paul just decide, “Oh, the loving thing to do would be to cry now – ‘boo hoo’”? No. Tears come from deep emotion.

2 Cor.2:4 For out of an extremely troubled and anguished heart I wrote to you with many tears ... that you should know the abundant love I have for you.

And the people felt the same way about Paul. When he said goodbye in Acts 20...

Acts 20:37 There was a great deal of weeping by everyone. And embracing Paul, they kissed him

The fact that they kissed him is significant. It is amazing how often we are commanded in Scripture to greet one another with a kiss. Craig Keener is an expert on ancient customs. He wrote the New Testament Bible Background Commentary. He is a respected scholar who has done a massive amount of research on ancient customs. And according to Keener, a kiss was not a normal way for people to greet a friendly acquaintance. It was a very warm, affectionate kind of greeting reserved for family members and only the most intimate friends.⁶

Ro.16:16 Greet one another with a holy kiss.

1 Cor.16:20 Greet one another with a holy kiss.

2 Cor.13:12 Greet one another with a holy kiss.

1 Thes.5:26 Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss.

1 Pe.5:14 Greet one another with a kiss of love.

Now I realize that expressions of love change from culture to culture, and a kiss today might not mean exactly the same thing as it did then. But at the very least we can say this – we should be greeting one another with expressions of warmth and love that go well beyond what is normal for friendly acquaintances.

Are you taking this seriously in your life? Are you doing everything you can to deepen your love for the rest of us? Maybe you are thinking, “I am not doing much to develop any deep, close relationships at church. I just do not have time for that right now. But I am doing a lot of other things. I show up on Sunday mornings, I give 10% of my income in the offering, I join in the singing during the praise time, I serve in this ministry and that ministry...” That’s great. I am glad you are doing all that. But let me ask you this – can you think of anything, anything at all, that is commanded more often in the New Testament than this – to love one another?

Jn 13:34-35 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Jn 15:12-17 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. 17This is my command: Love each other.

Ro 13:8-10 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another

Heb 13:1-2 Keep on loving each other as brothers.

1Pe 1:22 Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.

1Pe 4:8-11 Above all, love each other deeply

1Jn 3:11 We should love one another.

1Jn 3:23 And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.

1Jn 4:7 Dear friends, let us love one another,

1Jn 4:11 we also ought to love one another.

⁶ Craig Keener, Bible Background Commentary, 448.

2Jn 5 I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another.

1Th 3:12 May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other

1Th 4:9-10 you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. 10 ... Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more.

Ro 12:10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.

Eph 4:2 be patient, bearing with one another in love.

Gal 5:13-15 serve one another in love.

1Pe 3:8-9 live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers

And that doesn't include the many, many other ways it is stated, like "be kind to one another" or "accept one another," etc. Nothing is more important than love.

1 Jn.3:10 This is how God's children-- and the Devil's children-- are made evident. Whoever does not do what is right is not of God, especially the one who does not love his brother.

You may be doing a lot of other things in the church – you might be prophesying, doing miracles, feeding the poor, sharing your faith - you might have so much faith that every Sunday before you come in you stand out front and reshuffle the mountains. But if you are not pouring yourself into ever-deepening, authentic relationships with people in the church, if you are not pursuing love, it's all worthless.

1 Cor.13:1-3 If I speak the languages of men and of angels, but do not have love, I am a sounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so that I can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ And if I donate all my goods to feed the poor, and if I give my body to be burned, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

And maybe you are thinking, "I would like to have friendships, but no one is reaching out to me." The command is not "Be reached-out to." The command is not "Be loved and received and welcomed." So don't worry about whether you are being loved and reached-out to and received and welcomed. Just worry about whether you are receiving and welcoming and reaching out to and loving others – especially those people who are not being received and welcomed by anyone else.

Remember, the standard is Jesus Christ. He did not wait around until He was received with open arms before He received us. Instead of open arms He got closed fists, but that did not stop Him. And that is our example.

Now, I realize when you are new it is next to impossible to break into a clique unless someone in that group shows hospitality and welcomes you in. And if that is the case those people will have to give an account to God for that. But that does not excuse you from your responsibility before God. Even if no one reaches out to you from now until the day you die that does not excuse you from your responsibility to love.

So how do you do this? How do you make your heart love someone? You can not just flip a switch and make your heart have a deep fondness for someone. So how do we obey this command? That is the subject of the next lesson. But for now let's just make sure we are all clear about how much of a priority this is. A church where this is missing is a non-church.

Benediction: 1 Thes.3:12,13 **May the Lord make your love increase and overflow**

for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. 13 May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.