

One to Another

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You know, I look around and see that most of us sitting here have been in God's church a very long time, but in this day and age, who knew that in the churches of God we would have all these fractured relationships? Who knew we would be teaching about the God of the Old Testament and that it would precipitate all of this scattering of God's people? Who knew that a seemingly innocuous topic like this would tear people apart, starting at the top of the organization and going down through God's people? Who knew that the sharp cultural divide that we're seeing in society around us would also be reflected in the church? It's a definite sign that Satan is certainly in the mix. We've mentioned that a number of times. The sad result of all of that is that relationships between brethren are all over the map, the emotional map, in our church culture today.

It seems to me—we touched on this recently in a sermon or two—that with all the emotion and commotion that's going on among God's people that maybe we've forgotten some of the principles that God gives us about relationships. Tom Beohm gave that two-part sermon recently where he talked about brethren forsaking one another. It made me think about all the citations that are there in scripture that reference how God wants us to relate to one another. In fact, there are a number with that exact term, at least in the King James and New King James, that use that very term, *one to another*. I kind of borrowed that for my title so the title of this sermon is:

One to Another

I'm going to touch on a handful of those references today and discuss the principles that God gives us, that show us how to relate to and get along with one another. I hope you'll see, as we go along, that these principles apply; I think most of us have had opportunities, not only in the church but outside the church to apply these same principles, and they always work—we just have to use them.

I'll do this in outline form; I know Rick uses that format: one, two, three, four, usually five or six points, but I'm going to start out with the main point that actually kicks this whole topic off, our relationships one to another. (My method will deviate from Rick's a little on the main point; I'll just have one point, but I'll have sub-points: 1.1, 1.2, etc., pretty simple. I used to work as an instructor and when I developed a lesson plan it would always be in outline form. Now formatting software will give you a number of options as far as outlining—bullets, numbers, alphanumerical, all of that.)

When you think about interpersonal relationships with brethren you begin to see how important they are to God and why he gave those principles to apply in our relationships. We have a number of principles in the Bible about that—how to develop and maintain good relationships, and also how to repair them when things go south on

us, which they do sometimes. Some are in Matthew 5 and Matthew 18 but I'm not going to address them today, I'm going in the other direction with this. Again, those same principles apply whenever we're dealing with other human beings. We have the two great commandments, love God and love your neighbor. These are not exclusive to the church. I mention our society today and what a mess it's in, and when you think about that it's basically because people ignore God's principles. They don't want to acknowledge God in anything they do. Here in John 13—the main point—it's actually the springboard for the sub-points that I'm going to use. This is from the New King James, beginning in verses 34 and 35, where John records what Christ said, the instructions that He gave.

John 13:34 *A new commandment I give to you [Christ says], that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.*
35) *By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (NKJV)*

This first point is foremost when it comes to our topic—this one-to-another principle—because it's actually a command from Jesus Christ. Three times it's mentioned here. It's the one we're supposed to be following and patterning our lives after:

1. Have love for one another.

As we know, among all the Greek words for *love* there are *agapé* and *agapaó*, the latter being the verb form of that noun—the action part. The point is that Christ commands us to love one another, to look out for one another, and in fact to live sacrificially for each another, just as He did. We're all very familiar with 1 Corinthians 13; that's one of the components described there, sacrificing, bearing all things for our brethren. You notice again that this command is not just a good idea, it's not just a suggestion, but we're to love in the same way, with all of the citations that I'm going to go through now (listed as sub-points), which are all commands if we choose to look at them that way.

When you think about it, just looking at this further, not only did Jesus tell us to love one another, but the Apostle Paul did as well, in Romans 13. We'll go down to verse 8, and I like the New Living Translation for this particular verse, where Paul says very wisely,

Romans 13:8 *Owe nothing to anyone—except for your obligation [that's a command, that's a responsibility he's talking about] to love one another. If you love your neighbor, you will fulfill the requirements of God's law. (NLT)*

Going over to 1 Peter 1, verse 22, from the New King James, Peter says,

1 Peter 1:22 *Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart ... (NKJV)*

So we have Jesus, Paul, and now Peter telling us to love one another. As we know, John emphasizes that in his writings. Let's go to 1 John 3, verses 10 and 11. I know all of us who use software, we go back and forth between translations. Rick uses the King James all the time. I prefer the New King James; that's why we have software, so we can compare the variations in language.

1 John 3:10 *In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: [he's making a contrast in the context here] Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.*
11) [The point is] *For this is the message that you heard from the beginning [that's what Christ commanded, what we read earlier], that we should love one another ...* (NKJV)

In 1 John 4, again John emphasis agape love throughout his writings:

1 John 4:7 *Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.* (NKJV)

It's pretty clear here that we are to love one another. In fact it's a Christian responsibility as well as a command, as we're going to see. From this one command spring all of these other sub-points that I'm going to highlight, what I like to call "one to another" relationships. So where am I going with this? When we look at that command given by Christ, to love one another, the question is, how do we do that? How do we express that? We have a series of scriptures that we can look at, incorporated into my how-to points, as I've termed those—my sub-points—to apply to these interpersonal relationships because that is what these principles are talking about. This next principle is found in Romans 15. There are ways we can express our love for one another—the ways we can apply these to ourselves. Again, from the New King James,

Romans 15:7 *Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.* (NKJV)

So one of the ways we can express that love for one another, as Paul commands, is to:

1.1 Receive one another.

How do we do that? What does that mean? We just read where it says *receive one another, just as Christ also received us*. That word, translated *receive*, literally means "to take to oneself". It is sometimes used in scripture when talking about food, which just means to take food to yourself so you can eat it. That same word, if you like word studies, is used in Matthew 16 (we won't turn there) where Peter took Christ aside and rebuked Him. Peter actually tried to tell Him that He shouldn't be crucified, and Christ rebuked him, telling him, get behind me, Satan. In Acts 18:26, another reference scripture, that same word is used to describe how Aquila and Priscilla took Apollos aside to teach him.

For us, receiving means we take them, we bring them, we fold them into the family and help them. If somebody comes in and they're new, we help them to learn more of God's word. That's one of our functions, one of our responsibilities. Or if someone chooses to fellowship with us, we welcome that, we don't want to ignore that. It's unfortunate, and I'm kind of speaking to those of us who have a history in the church, that with a few groups you need to pass their litmus test before they will allow you to become part of the group. (The litmus test actually comes from chemistry. It's used to test pH, like an acid test.) Passing it means you are accepted into the group. Usually that test is a test of loyalty to something. Too often it's allegiance to a man or an organization, or a set of doctrinal beliefs, no questions allowed, thank you for your tithes and offerings. I even heard of one group (and don't ask me the name of this group because I won't tell you) where it's possible that if you don't meet all their criteria to come into their group you may have to be re-baptized. That's no way to treat people, we know that, no way to treat people.

If somebody comes along, they should be properly assimilated in the congregation; they shouldn't be held at arm's length until they pass some kind of set of contrived, pharisaical standards. That shouldn't be done. They shouldn't get stuck out on the fringe, awaiting approval. In small groups like ours, it's not much of a problem but in larger groups, people can very easily be ignored. I think we've all had experiences at the Feast of Tabernacles in years past where we had the huge groups and you could easily get lost. Frankly we've been in places—I'm thinking of Squaw Valley where there were maybe 10-12,000 people—you got lost all the time.

Another thing that happens along those lines, people get left to the side and don't really become part of the church family because no one even knows their names. I remember one time we were visiting another church area; a couple that we've known for many years was criticizing a minister that we knew really well and we were defending him. They said that one couple that they knew, friends of theirs, attended (this is back when everything was breaking up and there were groups here and groups there, everywhere) and people were trying to find a place to land—the walking wounded were looking for some place to go—they attended this minister's congregation for four months. You have to think about that for a minute because that's sixteen sabbaths and the man never even introduced himself, never talked to the folks or anything. Just thinking about that, that's sad to hear. We were sorry to hear that about that particular man because we thought maybe that's more his personality than anything else, but sixteen sabbaths? Somebody brand new in the congregation?

They felt like they weren't welcome in that congregation so they left and never came back. Sometimes we have to look at ourselves in that regard. I have to look at myself because I'm not a great socializer. I like people, I enjoy people, I really do, but I would rather hear things than contribute myself. I just don't feel like I have that much to contribute to things. I look back sometimes and I regret in some cases that I didn't get to know somebody better. Sometimes it's just too late. Unfortunately, I remember a few cases where I should have gone and visited somebody, and they died and I always felt really bad about that because I just waited too long. The point again is if we don't even

know people's names then we have failed on the first step, to receive people to us, to bring them into the fold, to bring them into a congregation. On the other hand, if somebody comes along and they have a really pleasant personality and they are really bubbly, it's easy to relate to those folks and we like them. But don't we have a number of scriptures that say we're not supposed to go on outward appearances? God says for a reason, don't do that because that's not expressing the love that Christ told us to have for one another. A lot of folks come along and they're really introverted like many of us, kind of shy, and worse yet they might be a little annoying, or even a little obnoxious, and sometimes they just frankly get on our nerves, but Christ says to receive them anyway. These scriptures tell us, don't discriminate like that, receive them anyway. The fact is that God has called these people so we're to receive them.

Rick and I were talking about that recently, not thinking of anyone in particular, but he was saying that sometimes God brings people to us for our benefit so we can grow in character, so we can be a little more patient and understanding. I reminded him that works both ways. Maybe some people don't like us and we're a character test for them. That should be the exception rather than the rule. Again, God called them and we're to receive them. If something happens, that's down the line. There's a caveat there actually and we have to use some wisdom sometimes about receiving people. I'm talking about certain things that happened in a congregation, some people that have come to a congregation but usually that falls within a pastor's purview, as well it should. But it should be the exception rather than the rule.

Sometimes someone comes into a congregation with an agenda that's not conducive to the well-being of that particular group. That happens, unfortunately. Actually we've seen situations where just one single person can come into a congregation and drive a wedge amongst God's people. Paul warned Timothy about that. We won't look at that but unfortunately we've known folks who come into a congregation who have an ulterior motive and they actually abuse the opportunity to fellowship with other brethren. Unfortunately in other cases we've seen brethren who move from congregation to congregation to take advantage of people. Years ago, again I'll never mention names, we had this one couple who kept moving and I was the moving deacon (probably by default, because I had a good back). I would get a crew together whenever they needed to move so that we could help them, but they kept doing that. In fact, sometimes they would move completely out of the area and then move back in. We came to find out—again, the minister had to take care of this—that they were just staying ahead of their bill collectors. They just kept moving. A minister had to put a stop to it because, frankly, it was killing us. (At one point we actually lowered a piano from a second story apartment building off the balcony with ropes.)

Sometimes people enter a congregation and have different beliefs that they want to promote. We had a gentleman who would fellowship with us for a time when we were meeting at another place (again, I won't mention places or names), and sitting down and eating at potluck, sharing a meal, he said, in an outspoken way, Jack, I'm attending with you guys but I don't have the same beliefs that you do. Which left me thinking to myself, okay ... ((laughs)). People do the same thing with the calendar. People come

along and have different ideas and beliefs regarding the calendar. Don't get me wrong, everyone is entitled to their beliefs, they can believe whatever they want to believe, the problem begins when they try to promote those different beliefs or push them on other people, especially when it comes to doctrinal things. It's just foolish to allow someone like that to poison the congregation, because that can happen.

You remember that account where Christ talked about throwing the stumbling block in front of his little ones. A millstone around the neck is not a good outcome for the perpetrator who does that. A pastor usually deals with those situations, warns and gives the person a chance, but if they insist, they are asked to fellowship somewhere else—that just happens. I remember years ago in Worldwide, a gentleman started attending with us (it's kind of funny to my wife and I), and we were giving him a ride to services. We had a van at the time and we were basically running a bus service going to the congregation in Pasco—we had 150 people, sometimes a little more than that—but he had some serious mental health issues and later set a Baptist church in Richland on fire. He was attending with us and he was really an odd guy. Again, he had serious mental health issues, and I'm sure God was not calling him; he just gravitated to church—that's happened. I can even tell you a story one time where we had an individual who was demon possessed, obviously, who came into the church and sat down with us and we had to bodily carry him out. This gentleman finally wound up in an institution.

Leaving those examples aside and getting back to our point of receiving people, all of us have to feel a connection to feel part of a group. You're not going to hang around with a bunch of people who ignore you and don't care about you, and don't even know your name. The point is, summarizing this point, that's how we receive someone. It's our duty, it's our responsibility to reach out to people and help them feel a part of the family, just like Paul said in Romans 15:7, which we cited earlier.

Going on, let's go to Romans 14, and as you know the context is talking about brethren judging and offending one another, and by that condition in the church, they were ripping the church apart—tearing the church apart. Paul was speaking to the Romans, and they had a number of issues; it was a mixed congregation, Gentiles, Jews and probably all kinds of folks there. Reading from the Literal Translation,

Romans 14:19 [Paul says] *So, then, let us pursue the things of peace, and the things of building up one another;* (LT)

From the New Living, that same verse says:

Romans 14:19 *So then, let us aim for harmony in the church and try to build [King James says "edify"] each other up.* (NLT)

1.2 In showing love to one another, we're to edify, to build each other up.

After we receive people, we edify them. We don't put a stumbling block in their way, we help them. That's what Paul is talking about here. We have to ask ourselves as

individuals, speaking metaphorically, for lack of a better word, do we act like body builders, strengthening, encouraging one another, or do we act like some kind of debilitating disease that weakens members of the body? Whether we realize it or not, we do have an effect on other people when it comes to edifying and encouraging. We have to think about that for a minute, but we do. We can either do that overtly or covertly, knowingly or unknowingly. What do I mean by that?

Well, the first way we can edify people (and sometimes we don't even realize this) is by our example—our own example. We have to ask ourselves, what kind of example are we really to one another? Do we display a Christlike example in our lives? As we come to know each other, know about each other's lives, how do we conduct ourselves outside of services, when we come together? Not by accident, we tend to remember people who set a good example, we really do, not only in their church life but in their personal life. Isn't it funny how we tend to make a lasting impression of someone due to their bad example? That one we seem to hang onto. If you look at politics, if someone sets a bad example in politics, their credibility is ruined, maybe ending their career. These days we have this two-tiered justice system so some people get a pass for setting a bad example with their conduct and the way they act and conduct their lives. The point is we can edify or weaken one another by our personal example.

Secondly, we can also edify or weaken one another by our attitudes (in addition to our example and our actions). We can appear to do the right thing, and I've seen people who have done that, but if our words and our attitudes make it apparent that our hearts are not really in what we're doing, we're not edifying anyone, we're being derelict in our responsibility to edify. Let's go over to Philemon—it's only one chapter. I like Philemon because if you read it, the reason it's there, that God included it, when you look at this individual's character, is he was a slave owner yet he was kind-hearted, he was generous, and his name actually means friendly or affectionate—that's what Philemon means. I like the New Living Translation for this. Paul, speaking to Philemon, says,

Philemon 1:4 *I always thank my God when I pray for you, Philemon, 5) because I keep hearing about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all of God's people.*

6) And I am praying that you will put into action the generosity that comes from your faith as you understand and experience all the good things we have in Christ.

Verse 7 is what I'm getting at.

7) Your love has given me much joy and comfort, my brother, for your kindness has often refreshed the hearts of God's people. (NLT)

When you look up that word *refresh* in the Greek, it's kind of vague but sometimes you can get more to the meaning of a word in the Greek by looking at the synonyms or the antonyms. The antonyms to that particular Greek word mean to wear down or grieve, to trouble, to make wretched or miserable—they mean all that. Sometimes a group is like

that. They can become very dour, negative, and with some groups it's actually kind of a downer just to attend there. We've been there a few times. It's like the elephant in the room that everyone is dancing around. The tension is palpable—we've been there too many times. That's just the opposite of building people up spiritually. Paul says, of Philemon, here's one individual who refreshed, edified, the hearts of the brethren—that's what he did. Does anyone say that about us? I hope so.

Going on to 1.3, the next one; I'll just throw this one right out there:

1.3 Submit to one another.

We all like that, don't we?—submit to one another ((laughs)). Let's go over to Paul's familiar passage in Ephesians. We've probably all been here about a thousand times, maybe more. Sometimes we've been beat over the head with this passage but we'll look at it from a different angle, if you'll stay with me. Ephesians 5 and we'll pick up the context in verse 15. Ephesians 5 is talking about walking circumspectly; you're redeeming the time (verse 16) because the days are evil; verse 19, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns, and when you think about that, back in the early church, those people were pretty happy, they were just happy to be together. They were going through a lot, they were suffering a lot. In verse 20 of Ephesians 5,

Ephesians 5:20 ... *giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ* [those two Beings whom we worship],
21) [the point I'm getting at] *submitting to one another in the fear of God.* (NKJV)

So what does it mean to submit to one another? How do we do that? The whole passage there is about living Christlike lives among ourselves, with each other, walking in the light, which it states back in verse 8. (We won't go there, but we just had a sermon about that, didn't we?) We are either in the light or we're in the darkness. I think some people like that grey area in between but basically it's one or the other. If we're filled with God's Spirit, we're going to be walking in the light, if we're conducting ourselves the way we should. In Ephesians 5, let's go back up to verse 11—it kind of mentioned this a little bit. Again, from the New King James,

Ephesians 5:11 *And have no fellowship* [no connection actually] *with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.* (NKJV)

How do we expose the evil works of darkness? By walking and living in the light, expressed by the way we live our lives. That's the way we expose that. I don't know whether you thought of it this way, when you think about submitting to one another, but one example is at the Passover. Kneeling before God is an act of submission and that's what we do in prayer. Sometimes, as we get a little bit older, or we have health issues, we can't really do that—when you have to stretch out because you're in pain, and it kind of interrupts your prayers, but you do what you need to do. Consider what we do at the Passover. (I don't know about you but I can't reach somebody's feet from a standing position, if they're sitting down. I have to kneel. I used to be able to touch the floor with

both palms, but that was a long time ago.) The point is that we have to kneel down, so in a sense, we are submitting to one another. It's an act of service, washing one another's feet. In fact, that was the function of the lowliest of servants in that time. Christ demonstrated that, and said, do this in remembrance of Me, and that was one of the first things He did to initiate the first Passover. Submitting to one another doesn't mean we take the opportunity to lord it over people as some have done. Some still do that. Rather, we are to be considerate of one another, recognizing that that's one of our purposes, one of our responsibilities to one another, to help each other become what God wants us to be—that's what we should be doing. That's the opposite of furthering our own interest, which happens sometimes. Looking out not only for ourselves.

It's been interesting to me how people interpret the whole concept of submitting to one another. You ever see this: Someone says you have to submit to me, or, you have to submit to me because I am the one in authority, or what's really ugly is in a marriage where the husband says to his wife, you have to submit to me. We've seen that and it's an awful thing—it's a terrible thing. I think we've all seen that merry-go-round go around and around. People try to use submission as a weapon. Unfortunately we've seen a little bit of this in our own family, from people who don't understand what they're reading in their Bible. Then sometimes you have church hierarchy dictate unquestioning submission to church government, with the threat that if you don't, you'll never be in God's Kingdom. Some of us have heard that before. Like it says in the context here, a father to children, but how about a father beating or browbeating, which is just as bad, a child into submission—breaking the will of a child. We've seen that too often in God's church. That's not what Paul is teaching here, an overbearing demand for submission.

The whole context of this, if you study this through—Ephesians 5:21 through Ephesians 6:9—is about submitting, that's the whole context. I would just like to line up some of those words for *submit* in the context. I kind of lined them up with bullet points. The first one, in getting to the point here, wives submit to husbands, husband love your wives, verses 22 and 24. Then the next one is children submit to parents, where it goes on to say, fathers raise children in the discipline of Christ without provoking them to anger, that's in Ephesian 6:1. Then it goes on to say, servants submit to masters, masters treat them as brothers and do not threaten, that's in chapter 6, verses 5 through 8. I'm going to add one there—church authority. These are references (you don't need to turn there but you're probably familiar with these) in Ephesians 4, verses 11 through 16 (this is from the Revised), where Paul says, and he gave some to be apostles and some prophets. Christ and God the Father set structure in the church. Some evangelists and some pastors and teachers, and then, very specifically, over in Hebrews chapter 13, verse 17, again from the Revised, this is a reference scripture:

Hebrews 13:17 *Obey them that have the rule over you and submit to them for they watch on behalf of your souls as they shall give account, that they may do it with joy and not with grief for this is unprofitable for you. (RST)*

If we look at those carefully and study them, we see a pattern in Paul's comment because he's addressing relationships, each one of the relationships. He's describing

who submits to whom and then he describes the responsibility of the authority figure within that relationship—husbands to wives, fathers to children, masters to servants, church to the members. If we look at that—and again, I’m referring back to the people who used this against others to manipulate and take advantage of them—he was not teaching a mutual or a one-direction submission between husband and wife, parents and children, masters and servants or church authority. He’s defining who submits to whom, in the context of those relationships, and the responsibility each has, especially the party in authority. What we’re talking about here is we have a responsibility towards each other.

I don’t know if you can see how that works but when you think about that for a minute, should a wife submit to a husband who beats her or abuses her? To insist on that would be totally irresponsible. No one has to do that. Same thing with an abusive parent to a child. How about a master to a servant? Today we would say a Christian employer to a Christian employee—how they treat them. How about a church authority that says you can only believe what I tell you to believe? That’s not responsible, that’s not scriptural. You see, if we are actually putting this point into practice, we’re doing it out of reverence for God the Father and Jesus Christ. I really like the way this is summed up in Ephesians 4. I’d like to go to Ephesians 4, again from the New Living Translation. We read verse 11 earlier but let’s pick it up there again.

Ephesians 4:11 *Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. (NLT)*

Yes, Christ did establish that structure within the church, but not to rule over, not to dominate, not to smother with authoritarianism, in the sense that you have to submit to me because I’m the one in authority. Verse 12.

12) *Their responsibility is to equip God’s people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ.*

13) *This will continue until we [notice the plural pronouns throughout] all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God’s Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.*

14) *Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won’t be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. (NLT)*

That kind of goes with the idea that you have to believe something because this is what I say is the truth. Another piece of that is—and I don’t know if you’ve ever heard anyone say this—I have enough truth, I don’t need any more. Even when I was going back to community college, I had a vocational tech instructor tell me, when I was there learning a skill that had a very steep learning curve, and I was having a pretty tough time, so I asked him (and I had a great respect for this gentleman), isn’t this good enough? He just pointed at me and said, stop what you’re doing, Jack. He then stuck his finger in my face and said, any time you think it’s just good enough, you’re not going to get any

better, you're not going to grow any at all. That same principle applies to us if you think about it. Going on to verse 15.

15) *Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing* [ever notice that if you embrace a lie or half truth, you don't grow, you just don't] *in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church.*

16) *He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.* (NLT)

What he's saying here is that the whole body, the Head and the Body, works together with God—using His Holy Spirit, following Christ's lead, living Christlike lives the way we're supposed to—then and only then is growth possible. We should embrace truth when we learn it. Personally, I think our whole lives should be about learning and growing spiritually—obviously they should be. If we're not growing spiritually, we're not healthy, we're stagnating. That's not a good place to be—not a good place at all. That can happen when people isolate themselves, which we'll talk about later.

Now on to the next point. This one builds on the same theme of submitting to one another. We always have to ask the question:

1.4 Do we serve one another in love or do we expect people to serve us?

Let's look at that in Galatians 5. Again, I'm going to use the New Living; it's worded more clearly for us today and it doesn't change the intent of the scripture.

Galatians 5:13 *For you have been called to live in freedom* [the King James says "liberty"], *my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom* [liberty] *to satisfy your sinful nature* [your own selfish self]. *Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love.* (NLT)

That word translated *serve* indicates that we shouldn't be afraid to go out of our way to help other people if we have opportunity to do so, even if it inconveniences us and sometimes hurts us. A lot of people say good things and they act like they have good intent but frankly they probably wouldn't go around the block for you. The point I'm trying to make, we need to be prepared sometimes, if necessary, to go out of our way to serve our brethren, serve one another as it says here. We're well aware of people who do that all the time. People hear about that and you don't go around tooting a horn or anything like that but people see that. That's just another way to set a good example. That's part of what agape means—agape love. It's kind of a sacrificial thing, if you look at 1 Corinthians 13. Serving one another just includes time and making time to do that, given the opportunity. Not everyone has the opportunity, of course. We could use many examples but that's what we're called to do—to serve one another. In fact, God expects this of us if we have opportunity to do so.

Let's go on to 1.5. This point also builds on the last one.

1.5 Show one another hospitality.

Given the opportunity, do we demonstrate hospitality amongst the brethren? I'll read 1 Peter 4 from a couple of translations; the first will be the New Living and then the next will be the King James.

1 Peter 4:9 *Cheerfully share your home with those who need a meal or a place to stay.* (NLT)

From the King James, that same verse says:

1 Peter 4:9 *Use hospitality one to another without grudging.* (KJV)

I like the Amplified; it kind of expands on that idea a little bit more. The Amplified says, for that verse:

1 Peter 4:9 *Practice hospitality to one another [and in another place it says, especially the household of faith];* (AMP)

Of course the Amplified has brackets where it's amplifying, kind of expanding the meaning a little more.

1 Peter 4:9 *Be hospitable, be a lover of strangers with brotherly affection for the unknown guest [and sometimes they are]. The foreigners, the poor and all of those that come your way who are of Christ's body [of the body] and [in each instance] do it ungrudgingly, cordially and graciously, without complaining but as representing Him [and that's referring to Christ].* (AMP)

The whole point there is being hospitable without grudging. I remember years ago, when we had a big congregation in the Tri-Cities, an individual came to work here, a construction worker, who didn't have any place to stay, so we took him in. My wife remembers this and he actually slept in one of the children's beds. It was inconvenient having somebody live with you all the time and this was quite a while; I don't remember if it was a month or two, I can't remember how long it was but he was waiting to start a job and have his family move here. It wasn't a problem.

I heard about a case where (and this was back when we had churches all over and I did this a lot of times on business trips, if I was staying more than a week, I would try to attend the local congregation) this individual came, and this is a story that was related by a minister, and I kept track of it because it was a good example—but he was saying this individual came into this one church area and he was job hunting and needed some help, so he got ahold of the pastor and had someone else try to find him housing so he wouldn't have the expense of a hotel and all that, so he stayed with the assistant pastor. Well, they accommodated him but I guess the next day or maybe the following Sabbath, they complained to the pastor that this guy ate them out of house and home. Well, what

they did was give him a sandwich (obviously they felt it was very inconvenient to put up with this guy). He got hospitality but it was with a lot of grudging. I know of another family that moved into a church area and had a child with multiple health issues. One night they had a crisis so they asked for one of the elders to come over and anoint the child. Evidently that happened, but the following Sabbath they got a scathing sermon about bothering the ministry at night. I knew the folks really well, and in his words, he said, we dove out of that church and packed up and left just as fast as we could. So they received hospitality literally but it was with great grudging, and as a result they left.

Another way we can express hospitality toward one another is by visiting people. There are many people in need. Sometimes we can be invited into other folks' homes and we can accept that, we can do that. So there are many opportunities for hospitality. A little caveat there, sometimes people will take advantage of you and after a while you develop some wisdom about that. The point is, don't be afraid if you have the opportunity to show hospitality to people. Make sure you're able, make sure your motives are correct, that you're not doing it grudgingly but doing it with a willing attitude.

1.6 Bear or share in each others burdens.

That's found in Galatians 6, a very familiar scripture. Galatians 6, verses 1 and 2, from the New King James.

Galatians 6:1 *Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.*

2) Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. (NKJV)

Again, He commanded, love one another. So bearing one another's burdens or sharing in them is one of the ways we show that love for one another. Everyone has his or her own individual problems and temptations. Every family, whether biological or church, has its share of drama, problems, disputes, etc.—every family, no exceptions. We all have a little bit of that, don't we? The point I'm trying to make is it's important to God how we handle that, how we bear and share those burdens with other people. What we really want is a good outcome for that, if we're helping someone, if we're sharing, if we share in them, so to speak, we can help them overcome maybe and thereby become stronger. We edify them, we build them up and we do our best to help them—that's what we do. For example, you can think of support systems like AA [Alcoholics Anonymous], places like that. They receive people, they bring them in, no judging or any of that, they just give support, that's all they do.

In a similar way, as brethren we treat one another like our own family. We provide the support and the help in whatever we're able to give—that's just what we do. Talking earlier about this, a couple years ago my wife had a stroke. We had a lot of support both in the family and from the church, and we really appreciated that, we needed it. For about four months it was an uphill struggle—that happens to people. We know well what people go through there. In bearing someone's burden, it doesn't mean we take it

from them. We just help ease the load if we're able to do that, if we have the means to do that. We try to help and restore them, build them up, whatever we can do by sharing. Many times we become directly involved. Again, there's a caveat there. It doesn't mean we take on other brethren as a project—I've seen people do that. Sometimes it's well intended, sometimes it's not. I won't elaborate on that, although I have a host of examples, but we won't do that. Sometimes you'll have people say, it's the minister's job to get involved in people's burdens, whatever those burdens might be—we don't need to get involved, that's the minister's responsibility, we'll let them do that. Years ago as a deacon, and it's not like today where we're spread really thin, we had a lot of people in a congregation but we had a lot of widows too. We had five widows just in Richland, just in our town where we were living at the time, who we were trying to take care of. We would ask people to help them, whatever they might need. They might need a little bit of carpentry, they might need something. We would go to the people in the congregation that could do that and ask them to help and 99 percent of the time people were very willing to do that.

That's just one example of sharing and helping, taking a little bit of a load off of other people. In most cases, the widows were alone and needed help—they needed help all the time—and again we have lots of stories that we won't go into. I got to the point where I knew who to ask to do what and that really took a load off of us because we couldn't do everything. We probably had close to 15 or 20 widows in the Tri-Cities area at one time. The point is, summarizing this point, are we willing to share and help other people's burdens, as we're able, or would we rather not be bothered, and have that grudging attitude? That's a tough question for all of us.

Going on to sub-point 1.7, which is:

1.7 Exhort one another.

I know you were hoping I would only have five or six points like Rick does. I try to keep mine short. ((laughs)) Let's go to Hebrews 10 where it talks about exhorting one another. This is a familiar scripture, and we'll break in on what Paul is saying here in verse 25, from the New King James,

Hebrews 10:25 ... *not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another [we know that word means to encourage], and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.* (NKJV)

And we do; more and more, we need the encouragement. Even in the latest, what I call the semi-crisis in the church, we need the encouragement of one another. How can we be aware, to know what other people need for encouragement, if we don't even fellowship? That's what Paul is talking about here. He's talking about coming together, about assembling together, about fellowshiping. There's kind of an implied question in these scriptures, in the sense that if we're ignorant of other people's problems, why is that? Why are we? One reason might be that we don't assemble together enough. We just don't get together enough. Sometimes we say to ourselves, if we don't know

people very well, I wonder about this person or that person. I wonder what they're up to. We kind of take that approach. We might think somebody is a little different or a little strange—I just wonder about them—we'll do that. One time years ago, we had a couple come into our church area and someone speculated (because no one knew this couple very well, and even though we received them in the congregation, they were just those kind of folks that were hard to get to know) that they weren't even married—that they were cohabiting. We visited them and that wasn't true at all. So someone voiced this opinion because they never took the trouble to really get to know them. We visited them, and they were a nice couple; they had a couple of kids, we sat down together for a meal and as it turned out they were vegans, and by the way, the meal was awful—it was terrible! ((laughs)) We still talk about that from time to time. In fact, I can't even identify what it was that we ate but we tried to be as nice as we could be and we ate it. Those folks moved on; we don't know what happened to them. That's just an example of not really knowing somebody.

We know how that goes, we wonder about people sometimes and, again, God does the calling, not us. The point is people can drift away and no one makes an effort to reach out to them, they just don't. People come and they just go. Sometimes I think with that kind of negligence amongst ourselves, God is not happy with that. Like it tells us here, we're to exhort them, to try to motivate them—it's a good thing, to be part of the family in that sense—to encourage them. Let's go to Hebrews 3; a little more about exhorting one another, in Hebrews chapter 3, verses 12 and 13.

Hebrews 3:12 *Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; 13) but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.* (NKJV)

Sometimes we're just afraid to approach people, to confront them for fear of maybe running them off. I think we've been guilty of some of that. We've neglected to get to know people. Yes, you have to be a little careful sometimes. If done the right way, people won't run away, and maybe if they do run away, maybe it's not from you, maybe they're running away from God. We don't know, that's not within our purview; but, like it says here, we are to exhort one another daily. The point is sometimes we wait too long to get together with people, to ask them if there's a need, and can we help with that.

The very last point, 1.8. Ephesians 4, verse 32, is the last scripture; it should be a familiar one. Paul says, in exhorting the Ephesians,

Ephesians 4:32 *And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.* (NKJV)

1.8 Be forgiving of one another.

Are we quick to forgive other people or would we rather hold on to an issue that may be directed towards us or someone else? Sometimes different groups get in a tiff with

each other. Sometimes there is a trust issue involved because damage has been done to the relationship. If you've been around for a while, you'll discover that God is a lot more forgiving than people are—that's usually the case. Sometimes people may leave the church and not come back because they are afraid of not being forgiven, not being accepted in the church family. That is just a lack of forgiveness that keeps them from repenting and returning to the fold in some cases. That's part of our responsibility to communicate to people by our attitude and all of that, that we will accept them no matter what the problem is.

Sometimes it's things that are really none of our business. If God forgives them who are we not to forgive? I also heard this example a minister gave. He relayed it years ago about a couple who came into a congregation and the man stupidly had an affair. The woman was so embarrassed by it, and was so ashamed for her husband, she left the congregation because she was afraid she wouldn't be accepted by the folks there. The sad part about that is she didn't do anything, it wasn't her fault. She was just afraid that the congregation would not grant her acceptance and understanding. We have to ask ourselves, how would we behave in a situation like that? Are we willing to accept people with open arms and forgive them as many scriptures tell us we should? If God has forgiven them, who are we? We have that example in scripture, Paul to the Corinthians. A huge lesson with a man caught in incest, committing incest, and Paul told them how to deal with the situation to begin with, but he also told them how to deal with it afterward. He told them to forgive the man, take him back into the congregation. A big lesson there for us.

How do we answer all these questions? How do we deal with all these things that tell us how poorly or well we're fulfilling that responsibility of expressing our genuine love for one another? We do have a responsibility to love one another as we read earlier in John. Like Christ told us to, to love one another. He also said that no man has no greater love than this, that he gives up his life for his friends. Let's go to Hebrews 10; we were there earlier, we read verse 25, but I want to go to verse 24. Summing this up, this is part of our responsibility.

Hebrews 10:24 *And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works ... (NKJV)*

We know that's talking about agape love, and the good works part is living our lives the way we should, not just picking up trash alongside the road but doing the works of God, following the instructions that we have from these scriptures, expressing that kind of love by applying these things. Yes, sometimes they don't work like we think they should. Sometimes we have problems applying these principles but in any case it's our responsibility to do so. Do we do our part and have love for one another, to stir up the good works? I hope so. I also hope that in hearing this message, maybe we'll think a little more deeply about the responsibilities that we have in our relationship towards one another, and that we'll see the opportunities, when they come along, to apply these timeless principles.