

Finally, Love One Another

One Another Duties

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Bible Text: 1 John 3:23; John 13:34-35

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The first of the "one another" headings that we considered nearly two years ago was love one another. The reason for starting there involved the number of "one another" texts wherein love is the directive, and those "one another" texts are, again, printed for you this morning on the back page of the outline.

There are 17 of them if you include the two "love one anothers" of John 13:34, there are 18 if you include 1 Peter 4:8, "Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another," the technicality there being that's really not a reciprocal pronoun, it is a reflexive, literally, "yourselves," but it may well be interpreted as the equivalent to a reciprocal. I would, then, include it as the 18th reference. That all said, about 30% of the "one another" references in the New Testament have to do with loving one another. Now that repetition joined to Peter's "Above all," that is, "Of most importance, keep fervent in your love for one another," adding to that Jesus' words, "By this all men will know that you are My disciples if you have love for one another," adding to those two Paul's, "Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another, for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law." Additionally, Paul speaks of the still more excellent way described in 1 Corinthians 13 saying that, "the greatest of these is love," and then, "pursue love," putting these things together, that is what is signified by the first heading of the series under love one another, the chief is love. That is, love is of the highest rank, the first importance, and all of the directives that we have been considering now over the previous messages, are really the fruits of love. It can be said that if we can get "love one another" down, the many other particulars we have considered will take care of themselves.

The chief is love. If God's children are to play together well, if God's children are to get along, then what the Puritan Thomas Watson calls, "the queen of graces which outshines all the others as the sun, the lesser planets," that love must be with us the preeminent and comprehensive essential of member to member relations. You may recall the words from early on of John Owen, "Love is the fountain of all duties towards God and man, the substance of all rules that concern the saints, the bond of communion, the fulfilling of the law, the advancement of the honor of the Lord Jesus and the glory of the Gospel. Love is the fountain, the rule, scope, aim and fruit of Gospel communion, and of no one thing of present performance is the doctrine of the Lord Jesus more excellent and eminent above all other directions than in this of mutual, intense, affectionate love amongst his

followers. For this he gives them innumerable precepts, exhortations and motives, but above all, he gives his own heavenly example."

You may recall the words of Jonathan Edwards, "All virtue that is saving and that distinguishes true Christians from others is summed up in Christian love. Charity is the life and soul of all religion without which all things that wear the name of virtues are empty and vain. Love appears to be the sum of all the virtue and duty that God requires of us and, therefore, must undoubtedly be the most essential thing, the sum of all that virtue that is essential and distinguishing in real Christianity. Love is the main principle in the heart of a real Christian."

We shall conclude our series, brethren, this morning by returning to "love one another," and the text of our concern, you see it on the outline, a verse that we have memorized on Wednesday nights and reviewed in the first hour on the Lord's Day is 1 John 3:23, and you can note the text at the top of the page in summary and in the language of Mr. Mensky, "You cannot believe," that is, in Christ, "without loving," that is, one another, "nor love one another without believing in Christ. They go together."

Our text reads, "This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us." In the previous verse in 1 John 3 we read, "whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight." We can say there are many particulars pleasing in his sight and, again, the summary comments of another, "Hence John uses verse 22, the plural commandments, yet when we look at all of them, they coalesce into just one, the one John names. These are not two commandments to believe and to love. No, these two are one. We infer from this that there is no true belief in the name of Christ apart from a love for his people and there is no true love for his people apart from belief in the name of the Son of God."

Now brethren, the outline is before you. We have three primary headings, the first being, love for one another, an evidence of sonship. This two-sided commandment, we may call it, found in 1 John 3:23 comes to us in a larger section that I will at least read through and comment upon with some brevity, verses 11 to 24 of this chapter, and this section sets out in summary what is indicated on that first heading that love for one another is an evidence of true sonship. Among the evidences of sonship identified by the Apostle John in his first letter, love receives much attention.

Back up now in your Bibles in 1 John 3 to verse 11 and in verses 11 and 12, we learn in summary that love for one another was central from the beginning of apostolic preaching, "For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning." Now that phrase, "from the beginning," could refer from the beginning of the Christian lives of the readers, but I believe it's better to be understood from the beginning of apostolic ministry of which John was a part. From the very beginning of apostolic ministry and preaching, love for one another was a part of the burden of the message. "For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; not as Cain, who was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because

his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous." The point of verses 11 and 12 as we work our way through the context, is that the matter of loving one another was central to apostolic preaching from the beginning.

We move forward to verses 13 through 15, this love for one another, further, is evidence that we have passed out of death, the death of sin, into life, new life in Christ. Verse 13, "Do not marvel, brethren," that is, do not be astonished, do not be surprised, brethren, "if the world hates you." Don't be astonished if you meet up with the Cain spirit out there in the world. "We know," verse 14, "that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him." Note in verse 14 that interesting verb, "have passed." Very descriptive. It was used of persons who migrated, or we may say emigrated from one country to another country. That's what happened to us, we migrated from the country of death to the country of life in Christ. Indeed, the verb "have passed" is used in John 13:1 of Jesus' departure from this world to his Father, that he should depart, migrate, emigrate out of this world. Love for the brethren is evidence that we have migrated from the country of death to the country of life in Christ.

Further, verses 16 to 18, this love is supremely manifested, and we can add patterned, in the sacrificial death of Christ. Verse 16, "We know," it's the idea in view of what is following that we learn what love really is, not what the world tells us it is but what it really is. "We know love by this," we know its nature, we know its character, we know its ways, we know the pattern that we are to copy, "We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us." And while the redemptive nature of Christ's vicarious atoning death, the redemptive nature of Christ's love is utterly unique, yet what follows indicates there was a model in it, a pattern in it for us to copy. "We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." There is a pattern of self-denial and self-giving that is to be reproduced in us in our relations to our brethren.

"But whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?" The love of God does not. The love of God does not dwell in a cold-hearted miser. He may talk a good game but his heart is still closed and he's still got his close grip, his tight grip on his things. How does the love of God abide in that man? It doesn't.

"Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue," that is, love is not to be a matter of just a bunch of talk, of just a bunch of empty talk, but rather it is to be shown with a true heart and deeds. "Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth." This love that is patterned by the Lord Jesus as he lay down his life for his people, this love is to be actively sacrificially expressed. His love, in the language of another, was not simply to be admired, it's an example for us to copy.

Well, in verses 19 to 24, as we zero in on our text, the truth here is that love, the fruit of faith in Christ and we add, and the Spirit, brings assurance, and that, again, is our first heading. Love for one another is evidence of sonship, brings the assurance that we are in

Christ, that we are by regeneration and adoption the sons, the children of God. Follow as I read at verse 19, admittedly a difficult text that will not be expounded in detail but summarized. "We shall know by this," by what? Well, the context answers, we read it, by the love which is under consideration. "We shall know by this," or hereby, "that we are of the truth, and shall assure our heart before Him." We know this because its discernible that there has been a transformation in the inner man concerning the people of God, and that there is now a genuine love for them patterned after the love of Christ for us.

"We shall know by this that we are of the truth, and shall assure our heart before Him," in verse 20 in the NAS reads this way, it may read differently, I think, in what you're looking at, "in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart and knows all things." The point being the text concerns assurance but in this case verse 20, assurance addressed to one whose heart is condemning him due to the absence of what? In the context, Christ-like love. He's examining himself and in an honest moment, he finds himself condemned by his conscience because he is the selfish, cold-hearted miser who can talk a good game but doesn't love in deed and truth and he knows it and his heart is condemning him. God is greater than our heart and knows all things, the point simply being perhaps God's condemnation will be greater than his own conscience.

"Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us," perhaps the positive inference, we examine ourselves to see if we're in the faith and we discern that notwithstanding all of our remaining sin and all of our failure and all of our imperfections, there is a heart's love for the people of God and that our lives express that. "If our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight." And again now these commandments coalesce into one, verse 23, "This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us. The one who keeps His commandments," which ones? Faith and love. "The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us," by what? The keeping of these commandments, faith and love. "By the Spirit whom He has given us."

I offer the summary is this concerning our first heading: the indwelling Spirit who works faith in Christ and its concomitant love for one another, the Holy Spirit who enables by the work of regeneration, who enables us to believe and to lay down our lives in love for one another, that Spirit, Romans 8:16, bears witness that we are the children of God, bears witness to this mutual abiding. It's all to say faith in Christ and love for one another, our concern, is evidence of true sonship, evidence of having been born of him. Love for one another brings an assurance that we are the sons of God.

Now our second heading is simply this: love for one another united to faith in Christ, and at this point we want to do the work of exposition in our text, chapter 3, verse 23. Follow as I read, "This is His commandment, that," this, that. The "that" is announcing that what is to follow is the substance of his, the Father's, commandment. We're going to know in a few minutes what that commandment is. And, "This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ."

We note in the first place here the object of faith and the object of faith is not a mere audible distinction. His name is Sam and her name is Jane. It seems that that's about the significance sometimes attached to a name. Well, you know that a name in the Bible has much more significance than an audible distinction between two people. The name biblically signifies the person and in this case, the person and the nature of Christ as he has revealed himself as he is represented in his word. The name denotes, quoting another, the person and all that he is.

John speaks now more definitively of who this person is, "we believe in the name of His Son." What does that tell us about the person and the nature of the object of faith? His Son is the eternally begotten, fully divine Son sent by the Father. "His Son" stresses the true deity and the unique sonship of this person who came to accomplish the work of redemption his Father gave him to do. We believe in a Savior, in other words, who is fully divine, the eternally begotten Son. It is the name of his Son, following the text and the text really gives us here a kind of miniature confession of faith, the name of his Son Jesus that tells us of his full humanity. He's fully divine.

He's the eternally begotten Son but he also was a historic person with a real name, and that name was Jesus, the Greek form for the Hebrew Joshua, meaning, "the Lord is salvation." The name given before his birth which declared his mission, Matthew 1:21, "She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins." The object of faith is the fully divine Son. The object of faith is the fully human Jesus. The object of faith is Christ, the Greek for the Hebrew "Messiah, Anointed One," anointed thereby God declaring him to be the consecrated, the authorized, the commissioned suffering servant Savior and Redeemer of his people. There is no other.

"This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ." The name embraces all that is true about the person and the work of his Son Jesus Christ. His deity. His humanity. His mediatorial role. His office as prophet, as priest, as king. His being Savior. His being Lord. And what is the response? What is the response of a sinner? What should be the response of a guilty sinner when he or she reckons with the Son Jesus Christ? What is bound up in the language of verse 23: believe. The term signifies in the particular tense before us a once-for-all, decisive, life-altering, life-directing act of faith. A once-and-for-all kind of crisis of faith where we have had it with ourselves and it's seeing Christ as our all-in-all.

When we come to the book of the Hebrews, there's something else that can be added. Granted, there is that time in our historic past where there was that converting act of faith wrought not by our own will but by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit, but faith is not merely an historic thing, it's not simply something that I have to recall. "Yes, years ago, I did this, did that, walked an aisle, signed a card," whatever the externals were, but one of the messages that will come through loud and clear in the book of Hebrews is that true saving faith is an enduring faith. It is not only past tense, it is present tense. It is a persevering faith, an enduring faith, a present faith, to believe and John will write of this

belief later in 1 John 5, "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of God." Again we have the connection there of faith and love. It will be spoken of in verse 5 of that chapter, "This is the one who overcomes the world. Who is the one who overcomes the world but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God."

To believe, in summary, is to do an about-face on yourself. To believe is to turn from and abandon and forsake and renounce and disown self. There is no hope for me in me. Faith begins when I've had it with me. We can also call it repentance. And in doing that about-face on self, there is the turning to another, to Christ. Turning to Christ and casting one's self upon Christ, taking Christ as one's only hope, as one's exclusive Savior and Master, a whole soul without reservation embrace, and such belief, faith, trust in Christ alone is not a barren thing but it brings the believer into a committed relationship with Christ marked by love for Christ, marked by obedience to Christ, marked by following, serving, living for Christ.

And, "This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ," but there's something connected to that, "and, and love one another, just as He commanded us." Love for one another, you can read it in your own copy of the Scriptures, is united to faith in Christ. You do not do one without the other. Love one another, again, has already arisen in this chapter. Going back to verse 11, "this is the message which you have heard from the beginning," from the earliest stages of apostolic preaching. We preach to you that we should love one another. This is not novel. It will occur again in the following chapter, chapter 4, verse 7, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God." There's the first heading, the assurance of sonship. It occurs at verse 11 of that chapter, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." And at verse 12, "No one has beheld God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us." And in 2 John 1:5, "Now I ask you, lady, not as writing to you a new commandment, but the one we have had from the beginning, that we love one another."

Love. The present tense here. Interesting arrangement, aorist, believe, present, love. The present tense, love, signifies the continuing ongoing practice of love; a love that endures; a love that does not stop; a continuing love of active sacrificial expression moved not by legalism but by faith in Christ. "One another" is to be mutually expressed amongst us, not just amongst a select few who are always giving, always serving, always sacrificing, always answering the call of duty. It's not just for our deacons but it's for all of us. Across the whole plurality of us in this membership, there is to be driven by the vital dynamic of faith in Christ, a broad-based mutual love criss-crossing the membership, up and down the membership, through and across the membership, and continuing as the course of our church life. As long as there is faith in Christ, there is to be love for one another.

My wife some time ago purchased for me probably to help me in the area that I'm not too good at, she bought me a book called "Preaching Today." That book has various accounts and anecdotes that are illustrations purposed to be illustrative, and time to time I find a useful one and I think here's the time. With regard to what I just said, that is we're to love

one another, mutually expressed, broad-based throughout the membership, and it's to continue on as the course of our life as a church, I came across this account concerning a little coffee shop in Portland, Oregon, and the account goes and it's written as if it's true, that the owner of the coffee shop, a drive-through business, was surprised one morning to have one of her customers not only pay for her own mocha but also for the mocha of the person in the car behind her. It put a smile on the owner's face to tell the next customer that her mocha had already been paid for. The second customer was so pleased that someone else had purchased her coffee that she bought coffee for the one in the car behind her, and the account goes that the string of this, one stranger paying for the mocha of the next, continued for two hours and for 27 customers.

Now what's the point here? The point is we are to love one another as a continuing course of life in our church, ongoing, a perpetual string of lovingkindnesses, deeds of love, active expressions of concern for the welfare of one another, mutually demonstrated up and down, side to side, throughout the membership. That's the fruit of faith in Christ.

And John continues, "This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another," and now note as the verse closes, "just as He," Jesus, "commanded us." Now while these words, "just as He commanded us," could comprehend believe in love, we wouldn't argue with that, I think actually based on precedent they are better to be taken with the latter alone because they accord with what is found in John 13:34, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another." It is written there as a new commandment, its newness being in the superlative self-denying example of Christ. That is the newness indicated, I believe. Then in John 15:12, "This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you." And in verse 17, "This I command you, that you love one another." And in John 13:34 just read, there is this phrase, "even as," just as, the phrase indicating comparison, "even as I have loved you." And again in John 15:12, "just as I have loved you." That leads to our third and final heading, love for one another patterned after Christ's love for us.

Now you may remember this little account under the heading which loved best. "I love you, mother," said little John. Then forgetting work, his cap went on and he was off to the garden swing leaving his mother the wood to bring." He loved her but you'd never know it. "I love you, mother," said Rosy Nell. 'I love you better than tongue can tell. Then she teased and pouted full half the day until her mother rejoiced when she went out to play. 'I love you, mother,' said little Fan, 'today I'll help you all I can. How glad I am that school doesn't keep,' so she rocked the baby until it fell sleep. Then stepping softly she took the broom and swept the floor and dusted the room, busy and happy all day was she, helpful and cheerful as a child could be. 'I love you, mother,' again they said, three little children going to bed. How do you think that mother guessed which of them really loved her the best?"

Mother knew that Fan loved her the best, why? Because Fan denied herself and actively expressed her love in the interest of her mother, that's why. She knew that Fan loved her best because of what Fan did in giving of her time and energies, not what she said. Fan

gave of herself to help her mother. She denied herself the swing, she did not go out to play that she might stay and rock the baby, sweep the floor, dust the room to help her mother. Her example reminds us of the pattern of love seen in the vicarious sacrifice of the Lord Jesus represented in the words previously quoted, "even as I have loved you," the words directing attention to the nature of something that is a model to be copied, a pattern to be followed.

Paul wrote to the Ephesians in chapter 5, verse 12, "Walk in love," and again, here's the model, "just as Christ loved you and gave Himself up for us." Ephesians 5:25, "Husbands, love your wives just as," again announcing here's the pattern, here's the model, here's the nature of your love, "just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her." Love for one another is to be patterned after the love of Christ demonstrated in his sacrifice. That means that his character, among other things, goes this way: it's freely extended. It's you do not love to try to get someone in your debt, it's freely extended. It is manifested in ways of self-giving and self-expenditure, self-denial practiced, manifested in deeds that help and support and strengthen and encourage its object. Its purpose is the good, the welfare of the one loved.

I ask you, brethren, who are those for whom you need to put aside self, to go outside of yourself, to go beyond your own busy agenda and your packed schedule and your busyness, and fervently, sincerely expend your time and your resources and your energies in the name of Christ so as to enhance the interest of a brother or a sister? Who is the brother or sister who needs that from you? Granted it is a challenge. In a life of tight schedules and multiple demands, and from some of you, long commutes, but it is a challenge that we must meet if we are followers of Christ and residents of his church. We must not fail. Put away the excuses. Loving one another is connected not to expediency but to faith in Christ.

I conclude this morning by referencing our Lord's letter in Revelation 2 to the church of Ephesus. The Ephesian church was commended by the exalted Christ and one point rebuked. They were commended for their moral integrity. We must have that as a church. They were commended for their doctrinal purity. We must have that as a church. They were commended for their perseverance. That's the burden of the Hebrew letter ethically and practically. We must persevere. If we don't we prove ourselves counterfeits.

But then there was the one rebuke. "This I have against you, that you have left your first love." J. B. Phillips paraphrases, "you do not love as you did at first." The Amplified, "you have left the love that you had at first." The essence of that rebuke seems to be this, that under the pressure of an immoral and pagan society and in view of their persistent efforts or the persistent efforts of false teachers to draw the brethren away, the Ephesians perhaps had gotten so busy rooting out moral failure and doctrinal error that they lost their grip on something that is to be primary, love. And good works and moral integrity and doctrinal orthodoxy for a while perhaps in Ephesus became substitutes for genuine self-denying, self-expending love. Yes, it was a moral church and an orthodox church and a resolute persevering church, but it was also a cold church and the exalted Christ says, "Unless they repent, I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its

place." That's a powerful way of emphasizing the primacy of love. We must be a people of moral integrity like the Ephesians, no depreciating that, we surely note appreciating of doctrinal purity nor of perseverance, but none of those things are substitutes for loving one another.

"By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." Brethren, may our church possess and manifest brotherly, fervent, sincere and self-denying love for one another patterned after Christ's love for us, thereby giving testimony that we truly are his believing disciples in whom his Spirit lies.

Let us pray.

Father, may we never be satisfied with a cold church however orthodox, however morally pure and upright, however dogged and persevering. May we never substitute these things or anything else for that which is above all, for that by which men will know that we are the believing disciples of the Lord Jesus. Father, may loving one another mutually across the membership of our church, may such love united to the dynamic of whole-souled faith in our Savior, Lord, may that love be the climate and the atmosphere of the assembly that meets in this place. May we adorn our message, may we accredit it, commend it, make it attractive by the climate of love that we manifest actively for one another. We thank You that we have this perfect model in our Lord's saving work, His laying down His life and giving Himself up for us, and we pray in the name of the Son Jesus Christ, the exclusive object of faith. Amen.