

Children Playing Together

One Another Duties

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Well, brethren, some weeks ago a friend outside of our membership made a statement to me and it stuck, it stuck in such a way is that I called this friend earlier before today to ask him about the statement again to make sure I had it right, and as he elaborated he told me the source of it. That statement, brief though it was, was expressive of a regrettable and yet undeniable reality, a reality that should not be but it is. The words were something like these: God's children don't always play together well. Now those are simple words but they stuck with me. God's children don't always play together well. Sadly, and at the expense of the household of God which is the church of the living God, at the expense of its vigor, its unity, its effectiveness, at the expense of its peace and its testimony, those words are true. God's children don't always play together well. To elaborate, God's children can manifest the pettiness, the selfishness, the bad temper and discord that are displayed by little children. It ought not to be, but it is.

In 1 Timothy 3:14, Paul writes,

14 I am writing these things to you [to Timothy], hoping to come to you before long; 15 but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.

Now within verse 15 are two descriptions of the identity of the church. First, it is God's house, the household of God or literally there in verse 15, the house of God. The sense of this designation goes all the way back to Genesis 28:17 when Jacob awoke from his sleep during which he had experienced a revelatory dream wherein the covenant promises given to Abraham and Isaac were reiterated to him and Jacob said, "Surely the Lord is in this place and I did not know it." "He was afraid and said, 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God.'" What made it the house of God? The Lord is in this place. Later in redemptive history, the tabernacle would be referred to as, "the house of the Lord, your God," Exodus 23:19, and so it would be with the temple built by Solomon. Upon the ark of the covenant being brought into the inner sanctuary of the house and upon the exit of the priest we read in 1 Kings 8:11, "the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD."

The old covenant "house of the Lord" was the place of God's peculiar presence among his covenant people who worshiped him there. It was the forerunner to the new covenant house whose primary difference would be it was constructed of living stones, the living stones of a people joined to and founded upon Christ Jesus himself, the corner stone. Paul writes of this new covenant house to the Ephesians in chapter 2 at verse 19, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone," and later, "in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit."

In Hebrews 3:6, "but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house--whose house we are." We're the materials by which the new covenant spiritual house is constructed and therein is the living God especially present amongst his new covenant people who have as their central purpose the worship together of the God who is present.

Peter writes in 1 Peter 2:4, "And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." The house of God, again, is the place of his special gracious presence among his people who in the new covenant are his house and his people who render there in their assembly worship to him.

Calvin writes there are good reasons why God bestows this name on his church, for now only has he received us to be his children by the grace of adoption but he also dwells in the midst of us.

Now a second identifying designation going back to 1 Timothy 3, "I write so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God which is the church of the living God." The church, the called-out assembled ones. That's what "church" means. An assembly of called-out ones. The house of God is the church of the living God and here we need to understand that the reference is to the local visible church. Consider the context, going back to chapter 2, at verse 1, the beginning of those statements comprehended by how one ought to conduct himself. There is the church, verses 1 through 8, praying, praying together, men rising up and being the audible leaders of an assembled people of God in congregational prayer. There is the church, verses 9 to 15, wherein there are distinctive male and female roles wherein women give credit to the Gospel of Christ even by their distinctive modest dress and appearance, and by giving themselves to their primary vocation which is of a domestic nature. There is the church of the living God that has elders, chapter 3:1-7, and deacons, chapter 3:8-13. There is the church as it's going to come later in this epistle to Timothy with a public ministry of the word, with a benevolent ministry to widows, a local visible church in Ephesus being served by Timothy.

The household of God which is the church of the living God, those two identifying statements and now there follows the functions of the church, the functions represented by the words that conclude verse 15, "the pillar and support of the truth." Noting the noun

"pillar," it signifies a column in a building which supports the roof structure. Now in ancient architecture, those columns would be prominently positioned, ornamentally designed and sometimes and in some structures posted on the columns would be public edicts published by rulers or courts to be viewed and read. In Ephesus, there was the temple of Diana with 127 pillars, pillars made of marble, pillars studded with jewels, overlaid with gold. And prominent with regard to the pillar was not simply its supportive function but prominent was also the sense of beauty which served the function of being a kind of public bulletin board that would draw people to the pillar, that what was posted on it, the edict of the king, the decree of a court would be read. The use of pillar in the context of a letter to a church in Ephesus may well signify not so much the idea of support as is primarily signified in what is coming next, but rather may primarily signify the idea of beauty which is to adorn literally the public announcement posted on it, the truth. The idea may well be signified by the term "pillar," that the church's function is to hold up the truth, to display the truth in such a way as to beautify it, as to render it attractive and compelling. The function of the church may well be signified here to be the function of adorning the truth that men will hear it, that men will read it, that men will be drawn to it, to render the truth as the edict on a pillar in the temple of Diana may have served, to render the truth distinctive, lovely and attractive.

Now that idea is expressly identified in another pastoral epistle. In Titus 2:10, Paul writes "that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect," to dress it up and beautify it, to make it compelling and winsome by the lives of those who profess that truth, to set it off, to display its excellence, to embellish it by conduct in the church, to render it lovely to the mind and heart by conduct which is fitting as to the substance of the truth the church professes and to the very character and origin of the truth.

The further function set out here in 1 Timothy 3:15, beyond the church being the pillar of the truth, it's further the support of the truth. The term there "support" means "a stay; a prop; that which holds up firmly," and with the architectural figure in mind, it would seem to speak of what we would call the foundation or the slab upon which the pillars rested. And the sense is plain: the church and primarily here in the context and throughout the New Testament primarily the local church, the visible gathered church, the church is that which upholds the truth in any generation, in any given nation, in any given society or community. It is not the government that upholds the truth. It is not the school system. It is certainly not the media. It is the church of the living God. The local church is the foundation which supports the great walls and roof of truth.

The pillar of the truth. I offer that the nuance that is intended may well be the matter of displaying this truth in its beauty and its loveliness to a morally ugly world; the foundation, that which holds it up, perpetuates it, enables its proclamation to go out into a world of lies like the one we live in. As Matthew Poole writes, "Hence the church is called the pillar and basis of the truth because by it the truths of God are published." He seems to be linking something of the nuance I suggest to the idea of a pillar. "And secondly, supported and defended, and in it, that is the church, they are only to be found as in their proper seat for to it the oracles and mysteries of God are committed and in it

they are exposed to the notice and the knowledge of all as public edicts were upon pillars."

Now beyond several applications that could be developed, when we consider the identity of the church, the household of God which is the church of the living God, and the functions of the church, the pillar and support of the truth, applications such as this identity and function obligates all Christians to then invest their lives in the life of a church, to vitally identify themselves with that local body which is the pillar and support of the truth. There is that application. There's the application that the identity and function of the church constitute a loud summons to give attention to how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God. Not any way we want. Not on our terms. But the Bible has revealed how we ought to conduct ourselves. Those are applications that could be developed but the one I'm after going back to the words I introduced some minutes ago is this: the identity and function of the church tells us there's much at stake in the matter of how we play together as God's children. There's a lot at stake. In view of who we are, the house of God, the church of the living God and what we are to be about, being a pillar and a support of the truth, there is much at stake in the matter of how God's children play together in this house.

The manner of our playing together will either adorn the truth or disfigure it, will either be a credit to the truth or a discredit, will either commend it or deny it, will either attract some to it or repel them as we contradict in the manner we play with one another, what we profess. The manner of our playing together will either solidify, strengthen and unify the church that it may live and vigorously and perpetually minister the truth, or it will enfeeble and eviscerate and divide and cripple the church to the point it will neither have the desire nor the resources to publish the truth. The manner of the children of God playing together in this, the house of God, will either affirm or deny our identity, will either serve or ruin our mission and function. May our present engagement of the "one another" directives, exhortations, warnings and prohibitions of the New Testament, may our present engagement of such serve the end of God's children playing together well in this new covenant house, playing together peacefully, playing together cooperatively, playing together helpfully, playing together supportively.

In John 13:35, one of the 50+ "one another" texts read last week, I read again, "By this all men will know that you are My disciples," by what he's about to say, you're going to publish who you are, you're going to broadcast something about yourselves,

35 "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

That connects with that sense of pillar. When we love one another in a world of animosity and conflict, it registers. Our loving one another commends our identity, our testimony, our ministry of Christ's Gospel to others. They see something distinctive and different and appealing. They may not understand our London Confession but they can see and understand a bit about what they observe, that we relate to one another differently than people in the world relate to one another. Our "one another" relations speak to the

world wherein me first, and my interest, and my time, and my terms, and my things, and my pleasures are the norm and here come the professed disciples of Christ, loving one another with a self-expending, brotherly, sincere, fervent love, and it's like those pillars in the temple, it draws men to see and it tells them at least something is different here.

Well, brethren, last week we began the "one another" series by a little grammar lessons with regard to reciprocal pronouns. This is what you need to remember about reciprocal pronouns: the ones of the New Testament, they convey mutual action among a plurality of similar people. That's it. The reciprocal pronoun that is at the basis of this series purposed to help us as God's children to play together well is translated in the New Testament "of one another, to or for one another," or simply "one another," and last Lord's Day morning a litany of over 50 texts common to which was "one another" was read, texts revealing much about how God's children ought to play with one another, and there was set out in our conclusion that the foremost sphere of application of these "one another" texts is that realm of accountable, committed, close, brotherly relations in the church of Christ wherein the children gather with one another, pray with, worship with, serve and labor with and together, the primary sphere is the local church of Christ. That is evident by the grade school observation that the "one another" commands, exhortations, warnings and prohibitions are addressed to local churches. The New Testament is a church book and its primary reference in its epistles is to local churches wherein the children have real face-to-face relationships and wherein the children together assemble to worship, serve and endeavor to please their common heavenly Father. The urgency of application concerns relationships that are not casual, that are not come-and-go, that are not occasional, that are not uncommitted and unaccountable. None of that. The urgency of application concerns your relationships with your covenanted, brotherly, accountable relationships with one another in these pews, the membership of God's house that meets here.

Now I have two additional comments. You may recall last week that I had three, in the interest of time, only set out one. I have two additional to set out this morning and perhaps the first will cause some retreat on that pool. The first is this: there is some considerable repetition of theme among these 50+ references to "one another" in the New Testament. Considerable repetition, and that repetition concerns more than any other theme loving one another. Almost one-third of the references deal with loving one another and we can deduce from that a couple of truths. When we read from John 13:34 the first "love one another" passage, all the way through 2 John 5, and we take note of the repetitious references to loving one another, we can deduce, number 1, the primacy of love amongst the brethren. We could say it this way: if we get this right, we'll get most everything else right. The primacy of love and that primacy is expressed in 1 Peter 4:8, "Above all," Peter writes, before all things. It's the language of what is of the first rank, what is superlative, "Above all," what follows? "Keep fervent in your love for one another." We can deduce by the repetition but we are taught expressly by 1 Peter 4:8 that in our playing together, loving one another is of the highest rank. It has first place.

And further we can deduce this: that loving one another sums up all the particular duties that are specified between the children, or to say it in this way, all of the particulars

beyond love are but the unfolding of various expressions of love. John Owen writing on rule 1 of our mutual duties in the fellowship of the church, Owen writes rule 1 is this: affection, sincere love in all things without dissimulation towards one another. That's the first rank. That's 1 Peter 4:8, "Above all." And then Owen goes on to write love is the fountain of all duties towards God and man. How do we know he's right? The great commandment, "You shall love the Lord your God. You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Love is the fountain of all duties toward God and man. Love is the fountain, rule, scope, aim and fruit of Gospel communion and, brethren, that is reflected in our own church's constitution and the statement concerning duties of members. All members are to carry out the responsibilities members have to one another. The primary responsibility from which all others proceed is to love. The mutual duties which are the issues of love are such things as forgiveness, forbearance, burden-bearing, prayer, sharing of material goods, exhortation, admonition, hospitality, and constant assembling together. They can be accurately seen as the fruits of love.

Well, again this second comment, there is some repetition and that's going to serve to help abbreviate what some might expect. There are other repetitions of themes amongst the "one another" passages: forbearance, serving one another, greeting one another four or five times. The second comment is this: there are some additional critically important passages that you may have wondered last week why were they skipped over, they read "one another"? Well, they were skipped over because I was being a bit narrow and technical with what was behind them, what was behind them was not a reciprocal pronoun, it was a reflexive pronoun. Now a reflexive pronoun simply means this: the action in a reflexive or the action expressed by a verb is directed back to the subject of the verb. The object of the verb reflects back the action of the subject.

Ephesians 4:32b, here's a reflexive pronoun, "forgiving each other." Now the subject is to forgive the other but the other is to forgive the subject, the action turns back to the subject. The same in Colossians 3:13b. In Colossians 3:16, we have a reflexive pronoun, "teaching and admonishing one another," or literally, "yourselves." Technically a reflexive but because the sense is almost exactly the same, the translators render "one another." Hebrews 3:13, the same, "encourage one another," or technically, "yourselves day after day." Hebrews 10:25, "not forsaking our own assembling together," literally, "the coming together of ourselves, but encouraging ourselves," rendered in the NAS "one another." And then in the 1 Peter 4:8 text we have it, the reflexive, "Above all, keep fervent in your love," literally, "for yourselves," it does read better, "for one another," but literally, "for yourselves." Though technically a different construction, the sense is the same as is represented by the frequent "one another" translations that have just been read.

Well, those introductory comments have concluded. I have one final matter to address before we get into the particulars of these "one another" passages and the final matter with which we'll conclude this morning has to do with the baseline foundational reality that makes us one another. What is it that makes you and I one another? It's not blood. It's obviously between me and most of you, not our backgrounds and where we grew up.

What is it that makes us a people, a number of people, who are alike and have mutual duties? We've got folks from Mexico and the Dominican Republic, folks living out in Nevada, people from New York and New England and a few Southerners mixed in, what makes us one another? Well, it's nothing human.

Now turn to Romans 12:4, "For just as we have many members in one body," now the analogy being conveyed has to do initially with these flesh and blood bodies, many members, hands and feet, ears and eyes, "many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ." There's what makes us one another. We're united to Christ. One body in Christ. We're joined each one of us to the same living head. We share a common life in the body from our same head. "We, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually," because we're in Christ, "members one of another." There it is. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12:27, "Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it." And to the Ephesians 4:25, "we are members of one another." Why? We are related to one another again, brethren, by a common life, that being the life of our living head, the Lord Jesus, who gives life to the body and to its constituent members. By virtue of union with Christ, we share the same life with one another, we are members of his body.

Now this shared life can be viewed as the analogy of Scripture informs it, much more particularly we have the same sovereign God who graciously elected each one of us unto salvation in Christ. We have the same Savior who accomplished salvation for each one of us. The same Spirit called us. The same Spirit wrought the new birth in us. The same Spirit worked faith in us. The same Spirit indwells and sanctifies each of us. We have the same heavenly Father before whom each of us stands as an adopted son. The same word of God, our authority for doctrine and practice. The same law of God, our rule of life. The same work to do, every one of us the work of mortifying our remaining corruptions, the work of cultivating Christ-like excellencies. We have the same promise of special providence that works to the end of conforming us to the image of Christ. We have the same blessed hope in a hopeless world. The same eternal inheritance of everlasting life in the new heavens and the new earth. We are brethren, we are a family, we are a household, we are a fellowship, a body, members of one another because of a common shared life that comprehends all of those particulars and surely more that could have been added.

Peter says it this way in 1 Peter 1, "Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart," and now he tells us why, "for you have been born again," there's the language of a common life, "you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, the living and abiding word of God." We are one another because we have been born again in the language of Peter, by the same living and abiding word of God. The same life resultant from the same birth, children by the same birth, children of the same heavenly Father, living together, playing together in his house. That's our commonality that makes us one another.

Brethren, where we're headed now is this, we're gonna look at those 15 or so references with the language of "one another" telling us to love one another. We're gonna consider the command to love one another, the character of the love we're to have for one another, it's to be brotherly, it's to be self-denying, it's to be fervent, it's to be sincere from the heart, not a show. We're gonna consider the copiousness of the love we're to have for one another, it's to increase and abound, it grows ever greater, says Paul. And we'll consider the conclusions to be drawn from this loving of one another, among them are the people who love like that, they're people who truly have been taught of God; they're people who truly know God; John 13:35, they're disciples of Christ. And what's the testimony to those conclusions? How they love one another. We want God's children to play together well in this, his house, and love is the first and the foremost essential.

Let us pray.

Father, help us to internalize into our attitudes, our feelings, our thoughts what is now before us in these "one another" passages that You by Your Spirit have inspired. And Lord, as we work through them and began with that which is first and foremost, Father, may the result be that we, as Your children in this house, will be found playing together well, giving testimony by our relationships that we are Christ's disciples, that we have been taught of You, that we know You. Lord, may the "one another" passages cause us ever to be a church that adorns the truth and ever to be a more unified, strong, solid church of the living God that remains in this area a support of the truth. And I pray in Christ's name. Amen.