

**Introduction**

I am pleased to add my welcome to the one you have already received, and I especially want to welcome all the first time visitors to this church. Whether you are just passing through, or are new in the area and looking for a church home, or perhaps are here to figure out whether any church is worth your time, I am glad you are here and I trust that this message will be a helpful to you. Let me introduce myself briefly; I am one of the 9 elders of this church, and I also teach chemistry at the college down the road.

By way of introduction, let me remind you (or tell you if you are a visitor) that our summer sermon series is on “The Church; Being the Body of Christ”.

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Previous speakers have shared the fact that the church is described in the NT as the body of Christ, and that this is all part of God’s design. As the body of Christ we are called to work together, just as the parts of our human bodies all work together; we have a unity in Christ but we also have a wonderful diversity; we are all gifted with spiritual gifts, and we are growing together in Christ. But how does all this work in practice? Well, it turns out that we are given a lot of specific instructions in the NT on HOW to be the body of Christ. How do we do this? What does it mean? There are whole chapters of teaching, such as Romans 12-15, Galatians 5, Ephesians 4-5, and Colossians 3, on how to live as the body of Christ, and I am certainly not going to try to cover all this material today. But if you read these chapters you will be struck by two words that occur repeatedly; they are the words One Another.

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We are commanded among other things to Love, Encourage, Accept, Love, Build up, Be patient with, Be kind to, Submit to, Bear with, Greet, Pray for, and Forgive ONE ANOTHER. Quite a list, and it is not even complete! One source lists 59 “one another” passages in the NT, and I have selected the most important ones and categorized them. Let us look at a few. The commonest command is to love one another:

**Love one another**

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

Rom 12:10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.

1 John 3:11 This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another.

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

1 John 4:7 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

1 John 4:11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

1 John 4:12 No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

Rom 13:8 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.

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

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## **Encourage one another**

Eph 5:19-20 Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Col 3:15-16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

1 Thess 5:10-11 Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

Heb 3:13 But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

Heb 10:24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

Heb 10:25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Then come commands to forgive, serve, and be humble towards one another:

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## **Forgive one another**

Eph 4:32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Col 3:13 Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

## **Serve one another**

Gal 5:13-14 You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

1 Peter 4:9 Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.

## **Be humble towards one another**

Eph 4:2-3 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

1 Peter 5:5 All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another

And commands to live in harmony with one another

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## **Live together in harmony with one another**

Rom 12:16 Live in harmony with one another.

Rom 15:7 Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

1 Cor 1:10 I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.

1 Peter 3:8 Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.

1 John 1:7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

This is not always easy; as one writer put it:

To live above with saints we love, O that will be glory  
To live below with saints we know, well that's another story!

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### Greet one another with a kiss

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

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

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

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

### Things NOT to do to one another

Rom 14:13 Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way.

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So this is a no-no

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James 4:11 Brothers, do not slander one another

Galatians 5:15 If you keep on biting and devouring each other...you will be destroyed by each other.

Galatians 5:26 Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

Whew! Quite a list; there is material here for a whole sermon series, not just one sermon. So today we can only look at a few of these commands, and try to learn from them. Let us begin with the first and most important point of the entire sermon: you can forget everything else, you can doze off, you can calculate the number of days to the first Hokies football match, you can plan your meal menu for the week, but don't miss this one.

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### 1. It all begins with God's love.

If you look at the "one anothers" honestly and with an open mind you may be tempted to think "I am sorry, but I cannot do these". **And you would be right!** Of course you cannot on your own "Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another" (Col 3:13), you cannot "serve one another in love." (Gal 5:13-14), you cannot of yourself "clothe yourselves with humility toward one another" (1 Peter 5:5). But the good news – the wonderful news – is that **we do not have to**. The reason goes all the way back to the last night of Jesus' life, when he was teaching his disciples at the last supper. So this is right before Jesus' death on the cross; right before He is arrested and tried and nailed to a cross for you and for me. And it is at this time that Jesus says

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

What did Jesus mean when He said "as I have loved you"? Well, it means many things, but above all it means that He loved us so much that he died on the cross for us. And because of that all of us who have put our trust in our Lord Jesus have a new life; a life of peace with God...

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He (Jesus) was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification. Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Rom 4:25-5:1

...And of freedom through the Holy Spirit dwelling within us.

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Through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. Rom 8:2-3

So we can love others and serve others and so on because we have ourselves been loved and rescued from eternal damnation and hell by the death of our Lord Jesus on the cross. We must never ever forget that!

One way of looking at this is to see our Christian lives as a fruit-bearing tree

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A tree can only grow and flourish, however, if it has a strong root system. Our knowledge of God's love for us is like that root system; it provides us with new life in Christ

And let me add a short sidebar to anyone here who has not yet committed his or her life to our Lord. What is the tree of your life based on?

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If it is not the love of God, then your life and your sense of worth must be based on something else; it could be love of self, human wisdom, the opinions of others, love of money, or something else. In this case the rest of this message is not going to make much sense to you because I will be encouraging everyone to live the exact opposite of the life based on these foundations; what we might call the "normal American life". But let me also say that deciding to follow Jesus Christ is the best thing that you could ever do, because your life would then be based on the sure foundation of the love of God for you. I would love to talk to you afterwards if you have any questions about what I have been saying.

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## **2. The Christian life is meant to be lived in community.**

This is an obvious conclusion, but since it is obvious it can easily be overlooked. The very fact that there are 59 "One another" passages in the NT tells us that God intended for Christians to know each other and to interact with one another. And this means that we cannot be (or at least we should not be) isolated Christians, coming to BCF for a "fix" of worship and teaching on Sunday morning, and then living an independent life during the week. If that is all we are doing we do not really know our fellow believers and if we do not know them we certainly cannot love them in any meaningful way.

If we are really to become part of the body of Christ, we must find ways to connect with fellow believers outside of this preaching service. And there are lots of ways to do this. You can do two things right here on Sunday morning; you can stay for the coffee fellowship time after (or before) this service, and you can start to attend one of the several excellent adult elective classes offered at 9:45 and 11:15 am. These are both good things to do, and they offer a better chance to get to know others than this service does, but even better is to get involved in one of the several house groups, or community groups as they will soon be known. When you join one of these groups you will become part of a group of loving and caring Christians who will pray for you and encourage you and study the Bible with you, and you will be blessed by a true Christian community. If you are a student at VT or Radford or elsewhere you can also get involved in one of the small groups that most of the campus ministries have. There are also ways to get involved by joining one of the BCF ministry teams. The important thing is to get involved in some small group of Christians so that you can be "One anothered" by them.

I came across a great illustration of the need for Christians to be in community with each other. A grove of sequoia trees is a wonderful sight; majestic trees reaching up to 300 feet into the sky.

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But did you know that the sequoia tree has its roots just barely below the surface, and in some cases on the surface?

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How is it possible that such a tall tree can have such shallow roots and not blow over in a high wind? The answer is that they grow only in groves and their roots intertwine under the surface of the earth, making one huge mass of intertwined roots extending throughout the grove. So, when the strong winds come, they hold each other up; they are supporting and upholding one another. A single tall sequoia tree could never stand up to the wind; it would just blow over. And this is just what Christians should be doing. An isolated Christian, no matter how tall and strong he or she looks, can be blown over by the wiles of the devil and the winds of our godless culture. But a group of loving and supportive Christians, with roots in Christ and intertwined with each other, will stand even under strong winds.

So the Christian life is meant to be lived in community.

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### 3. We can and must love one another because God loved us first

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It is God's love for us in Jesus Christ that both compels us and enables us to love others

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Jesus' dear friend John wrote in his first letter "We love because he first loved us." 1 John 4:19 In other words, God's love for us is the basis of our love for each other; it is what makes the tree grow and flourish and produce the fruit of love for one another.

And love for one another is the basic and most important of all the one another commands. In Matthew's gospel Jesus was being questioned by a group of Jewish leaders:

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Matt 22:36-40

One of (the Pharisees), an expert in the law, tested him with this question: Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

So if loving your neighbor as yourself is the second most important commandment, then loving one another is included in that commandment. And all the other "one anothers" depend on this first one. Without love for one another we are not going to serve one another, not going to forgive one another, we are not going to be humble towards one another, and so on.

And then let's not forget the second half of Jesus' words to his disciples on the night he was betrayed

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John 13:34-35 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. **By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.**" So our love for our fellow believers is a witness to the world; it is so different from normal American life that people will see it and be attracted to Jesus through it.

This tells us, by the way, that Christian love is not just a warm fuzzy feeling, since the world cannot see our

warm fuzzies. No, love in the Bible always involves **action for the benefit of the person loved**

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Sadly Christians do not always love one another. In two weeks' time Don Emerson will be speaking on "The Imperfect Bride. When we don't act like the Body". And I read of a new believer who read through the bible and then asked for a book on church history. When she was asked why, she replied "I want to find out when Christians stopped behaving like Jesus" Ouch!

So how can we, how should we love one another? There are two ways to answer this question. The first one is to quote C. S. Lewis, who wrote in his book Mere Christianity,

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"Do not waste your time bothering whether you 'love' your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this, we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him. If you injure someone you dislike, you will find yourself disliking him more. If you do him a good turn, you will find yourself disliking him less."

The other way to see this is to see that all the other "one anothers" flow out of our love for one another. God's love for us is the root, which leads to our love for one another, which then flows out into all the other one anothers.

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So if you want to increase your love for other believers, start practicing serving others, agreeing with other Christians, greeting one another, submitting to other Christians, bearing with other Christians, forgiving others, encouraging one another, accepting one another with all our quirks and differences, etc. This is where the rubber meets the road.

## 4. A key part of loving one another is encouraging one another

We do not have the time to discuss all the "one another" commands in Scripture, so I have selected just one; the command to encourage one another in three passages from the letter to the Hebrews.

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From these passages we see that our encouragement of our fellow believers should be regular:

Heb 3:13 **But encourage one another daily,**

It should be thoughtful and directed to increasing each other's love and good deeds

Heb 10:24 And let us consider how we may **spur one another on toward love and good deeds.**

This phrase "spur one another on" implies a deliberate action to move a fellow believer closer to God. It might be a challenge to read the Bible regularly, or an invitation to pray together regularly, nor perhaps a challenge to give up something to God, or to refrain from some harmful habit. But do you see the point here? We cannot do these things, even if we want to, unless we know the other person well. So this means we must be meeting together, probably sometime other than Sunday morning.

Heb 10:25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another.

And here the writer directly challenges us to meet together to encourage each other. Encouragement is vital to our Christian lives; without it we may begin to wither.

Let me end with a word of thanks and an assignment. For those of you who are visitors I need to tell you that I am being treated for prostate cancer, and that I will start radiation treatments next month. Many of you have enquired how I am doing and have told me you are praying for me, and I thank you most sincerely for your

concern and prayers. You have been a great encouragement to me!

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Now for your assignment. Don't wait to encourage someone. None of us is promised tomorrow; we've only got today. Your assignment is to encourage someone different every day this week. You can be creative in how you do so; you can do it in person, or you can use Facebook, Twitter, other social media, e-mail, letters, the phone, skywriters, whatever. I suggest that you to pray over this assignment; you might find that God leads you to specific people who need His touch through you.

May the Lord bless you as you seek to love and encourage one another!

Amen