

Loving your True Family as a Way of Life

Our Identity in Christ

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This morning, I want to look at something in the text, in this passage that I feel like I skipped over a little too quickly; though I touched on it, I didn't spend appropriate time on it. I want to go back to verse 17 this morning, though we spent time last time on verses 18 to 20, and I think we'll need to say a little more about those verses later. I'm going to go back to verse 17 and I want to look at one command in the string of commands there. There's a four-fold imperative in verse 17, four commands given to us: honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king. I think we covered three of them pretty well, but the fourth, I think we need to talk about this morning, the command to love the brotherhood, and what I want to title the message this morning, "Loving Your True Family as a Way of Life." Loving your true family as a way of life. We're called in the passage to love the brotherhood. It's literally the word is pretty good translation to say brotherhood, the brethren, some translations say. It's a word which speaks of familial connection and we are called to love our true spiritual family. In God's eyes, more important even than our earthly family is the spiritual family, God's household, the body of Christ and you see that in this command.

Love is something that's so much talked about in the world and so easily talked about in our own lives, we throw the words around, we know we're called to love one another, but this passage and is calling us to apply this in our lives in a way that becomes visible and real. It's interesting, there are 54 "one anothers" in the New Testament. You'll sometimes hear Bible teachers talk about this. I know I bring it up from time to time myself. A key word in the New Testament is the word, it's one word in Greek, "one another." In English, of course, two, but in Greek, one word that means "one another," and you have, by my count, 54 commands in the New Testament, instructions about how we are to treat one another. 54, that's a lot. Encourage one another, for example. Comfort one another. Pray for one another. Confess your sins to one another. Teach one another. Build one another up. Admonish one another. But you have the command "love one another" 14 times; more than 25% of the commands of "one another," and by my count, there's about 24 different commands, some of them are repeated. Greet one another with a holy kiss comes in at four. That's one we don't apply much today with good reason, that's a cultural application, but the idea is to apply it correctly means that you're so excited to see one another that you greet one another with joy. There's that familial connection is obvious. But so many different things, build one another, encourage one another, comfort one

another, but 14 times love one another. Three times Jesus said this in his last evening with his disciples in the Upper Room Discourse, John 13:34, and 35, "A new commandment I give to you that you love one another as I have loved you, that you love one another." He goes on to say in chapter 15:12, love one another, this is how you basically, there's no greater love than this, a man lays down his life for his friends. Love one another, lay down your life for one another. So we're going to talk this morning about what that means. The command in the verse is love the brotherhood, love the family, love those who are your true kinfolk, your spiritual eternal kinfolk. What does that mean though? How do we do it? That's what we're going to look at this morning. What does it look like to love our brothers and sisters as Jesus has loved us?

Let's pray together and ask his blessing on our time.

Our Father, we come this morning as always a needy people to You. We rejoice that we come to the God of all grace who abounds in lovingkindness, mercy, compassion. We come knowing that You have loved us before we loved You, and we only love You because You first loved us. We come asking You, Lord, to show us what love is and to really teach us how to love one another. Make us more and more in reality, in experience what we are spiritually through Christ. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

So looking at really loving, truly loving your true family as a way of life, loving your true family as a way of life. It's interesting, this passage, you know, what we've noticed about the book of 1 Peter is that in many ways the first section of the book ends at chapter 2, verse 10, 1:1 to 2:10 is one section that you can see is more theological and doctrinal in emphasis and at 2:11 to 5:14, the second half of the book is more practical. It's more ethical. It's more about your way of life. The first half that's doctrinal and theological is telling you and me who we are. It's about identity, who you truly are in Christ. And then in chapter 2, verse 11, the emphasis turns now to now in light of who you are because of what Christ has done, in light of who you are, this is how you should live.

A key word that Peter uses throughout is the word behavior. It's there in verse 12 of chapter 2 if you look back with me at verse 12 for a minute. He says, "Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles." This word is used seven times in the book, five times you'll translate, the New American Standard translates as "behavior," this Greek word, which means "to turn about" literally, and it means all that you do, wherever you go. It's also translated "conduct or to conduct yourself" is actually the verb, and it's translated "way of life" in one other place in 1 Peter in the New American Standard. And so what Peter is concerned about is that our behavior, our way of life match up with what God has done for us in Christ and his concern is shared by the rest of the New Testament, and we want to look this morning at this issue" is my way of life, is your way of life matching up to who you are in Christ in the area of loving your true spiritual family.

I want us to look at another passage actually to help us this morning. Turn back to Ephesians 4. I chose this passage for a number of reasons to help us unpack what love looks like. One of the reasons I chose it is because Paul's outline is identical to Peter's in the sense that Paul, and it's not always the case in all of his letters, not always the case in

all the epistles, but Paul in Ephesians basically spends the first half of the book talking about doctrinal, theological concerns. Then he turns the corner to talk about ethical and practical concerns. He spends chapters 1 to 3 unpacking all that Jesus has done, all that God has done in Christ for us, and then in chapter 4 he basically turns the corner and says, "Now in light of all of this you need to live this way," and he's concerned about way of life also. In fact, the verse begins the chapter, chapter 4, verse 1 of Ephesians, "Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called." The word "walk" is one of Paul's favorite ways to speak to what Peter's talking about when he talks about behavior, that is your conduct, your way of life. Paul, when he uses the word "walk," he's using it in a metaphorical sense, that is wherever you go, whatever you do, your life, your way of life.

He says, "I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you, I urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called." Your way of life, your behavior needs to match up. This word "worthy" actually, walk, let your behavior, let your way of life be worthy of your calling. So the comparison, "Your calling on the one hand, which I've been talking about for three chapters," Paul says, "your calling is magnificent, may your walk, may you strive to make your walk, your way of life worthy of that." In fact, the word translated "worthy" is a word which at its root idea is kind of balancing or weighting, W-E-I-G-H-T, not W-A-I-T, the weight of something, the heaviness of something. And so you picture a balance and you're trying to make this one side has got some heavy weight on it and you need to balance it out by putting appropriate weight on the other side so that it comes into balance. He's saying, "Look at what God has done for you in Christ, the massive weight of that. Now live in such a way that your life reflects it. You have received a high calling. Walk it out."

And what he does is he turns immediately to the issue of love; it becomes the key theme in this passage, these first 16 verses. He speaks three times of love. He says, read on down in verse 2, after he says, "walk in a manner worthy of the calling which you've been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." He continues on in verse 11, he tells us that we have been given by the Lord Jesus Christ spiritual gifts, leaders, "apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastor, teachers to equip us, the saints, to equip the saints for the work of service to the building up of the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith," verse 13, "and of the knowledge of the Son of God to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness and deceitful scheming, but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love." Paul is trying to give them some guidance on how to live out the love that he's put in their hearts, that Christ has put in their hearts.

How do you live it out? Walk in a manner worthy. The scales need to be balanced and it's important for us to take a second to review what Paul has said in the first three chapters. So much resonance with 1 Peter here. In the first three chapters, he's basically said that God in love predestined you to adoption, chapter 1, verse 4. You're chosen in him before the foundation of the world, chapter 1, verse 3. And in love, he predestined you to adoption. God has loved you in a way that he's ordered every single thing in your life so that you would come to the point where you believed in him and placed your faith in him. He ordered every detail to bring you to himself. His love for you from eternity past was determined to win you to himself and he unpacks that in chapter 1, the miracle of the inheritance that we received, the Spirit, the redemption, forgiveness of sins, all of that unpacking that love that predestined you. And in chapter 2, he explains justification by grace through faith and then he turns in chapter 2, verse 11, to how this love has transformed not just our relationship with God vertically, but how it's transformed everything horizontally.

Verse 11, he's speaking to a mostly Gentile audience. Gentiles are non-Jews. Everybody else. Jews and everybody else. Most all of us are in the everybody else category, the Gentiles. The Jews were God's people, but the message that he's saying, Jesus has come to save all people. He's bringing the Gentiles into God's family, into God's house. Verse 11 of chapter 2, "Therefore remember that formerly you the Gentiles in the flesh who are called uncircumcision by the so-called circumcision, which is performed in the flesh by human hands, remember that you were at that time," listen to these descriptions, "you were at that time before you're saved, separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." That was the reality for all of us but now, verse 13, "in Christ Jesus, you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ, for He Himself is our peace, who has made both groups into one and broke down the barrier, of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity." In verse 16, "and that it might reconcile them both, that is, Jew and Gentile in one body to God through the cross." He's saying, "Listen, there's no boundary between Jew and Gentile. God has abolished it." It was the deepest boundary that the world had ever known. The boundary between Jew and Gentile makes every other racial or ethnic division look tiny by comparison and God demolished it in the cross, and this supernatural unity is now part of what he's doing. He's brought Jew and Gentile together in one family. Look at verse 19, "So then you are now no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizen with the saints and are of God's household." You are of God's family, Jew and Gentile in Christ, one family. It's hard for us to relate to the impact of that because we don't live as much aware of these things as they were in the first century, but this is massive.

So he's saying God has loved you, the eternal God has loved you with an eternal electing love. He's brought you to himself and in bringing to himself, he's brought about a unity that is supernatural that the world cannot understand. And then in chapter 3, he continues to expand on this and he says in chapter 3, verse 4, he explains the very end of it, my insight, understanding my insight into the mystery of Christ in which "other generations was not made known to the sons of men as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets in the Holy Spirit." What is the mystery? of Christ. Verse 6, to be specific,

that the Gentiles are "fellow heirs and fellow members of the body and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel." The mystery of Christ is that God always intended to bring people, every tribe and tongue and kindred into his family. He was going to do something so wonderful, so glorious that it was going to stagger the minds of everyone who saw it and that's what happens, that's the unity that Jesus Christ brings. He takes those who were formerly enemies and he reconciles them because when you come to God and you're reconciled to God, he takes away the enmity that you have toward others and he gives you love for every other person who belongs to Jesus, who is now your brother or sister and he implants supernatural love in you and the world can understand it.

He goes on to say though, it gets even more amazing, verse 9, he's getting into God's ultimate purpose, "to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things." Verse 10, "so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities and the heavenly places." What Paul is saying is God has done something in Christ that is rooted in eternity. He chose you in him before the foundation of the world. He loved you. before the foundation of the world. In love, he has predestined you to come to him. In coming, all of us coming to him from all of our different backgrounds, all of our different life experiences, now we come into the family and we have a unity that the world can't understand, and what he's saying here in chapter 3, verse 10 is the unity that we have when you and I manifest the agape love of God in our relationships, that it is a proclamation, a preaching in the heavenly places to the demonic kingdom. He's saying there's something about when believers come together in oneness and unity that Satan himself trembles. He cannot fathom how this has happened. Such is the work of God in our lives. He's given us a unity that when we manifest, it's like the gates of hell are being smashed when we love one another.

Now think about how great and grand that vision is. That's who you are if you belong to Jesus Christ. If you've repented of your sins and placed your faith in Jesus, you've been reconciled to God through Christ's blood not because of anything you've done, but because of everything Jesus has done and you've looked to him in faith and repentance. You are now his blood-bought child and when you became his child, you became brothers and sisters with all of his other children and they are your true family, and this family that spans all of history, goes all across the globe, is rooted in eternity, God's glory is manifest in it and it's so magnificent that the demonic forces see it and tremble. But we can't see it. It's not visible to us.

And so what Paul then says in chapter 4, verse 1, therefore, he's basically saying, "In light of all that I've told you, walk this out." He's saying the same thing Peter said, "In light of all that I've told you, let it impact your behavior. Let it change the way you live." And I think that he gives three really helpful commitments that we need to make to each other, three commitments associated in this passage with every time he refers to the word love. And I want to point out something I didn't say earlier. I want to mention this because it's important. Back in 1 Peter 2, remember the fourfold command is honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king. So you have two parallel instructions in the

way you relate to other people, you are to honor all people, that is respect them, care for them, show kindness to them, value them as human beings and created in the image of God, but you are to love the brotherhood. You are to honor the king, that is, you're to show respect to the king. You're to give him appropriate honor, but you are to fear God. You see the distance between honoring the king and fearing God. Think about the distance. We're supposed to show respect to every person in authority and we've talked about this, we've said we have to speak the truth in love to them and tell them that they're doing evil, but we do it from an attitude of respect, knowing that God has placed them in their position, and we should show them every measure of respect that's due them. But you are to stand in awe of God. That's what it means to fear God. Honor the king, but stand in awe of God. Now think about the parallel, honor all men. There's a sense that we need to stand in awe of our relationship with other believers. I mean, it's love, supernatural love, agape love is the word there in 1 Peter 2 and it's the word here three times in Ephesians 4. Agape love, this word is taken by the New Testament authors. It's a word which wasn't common. It was used in Greek literature, but they didn't really have a clear definition and the authors of the New Testament take the word and infuse it with biblical meaning. It means the love which comes from God. It's the love which is the essence of who God is. It's a love which is not dependent on the object that is loved. It's a love that is given out of a determination, a commitment to love in spite of the unloveliness of the... Romans 5:8, by this we know the love of God. Let's see. God demonstrates his love for us in while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. What is love? What does it look like? God's love started when we were yet sinners hating him. He loved us. Now Jesus says, "As I have loved you, you love one another."

So we're called to love each other when we don't deserve to be loved. When there's nothing in us that calls out love, we're called to do that, and we're to see that, the difference between all people. The reason I said your true family, loving your true family, is because there's a sense in which the body of Christ is your true family so far above even your earthly family. Though there are great responsibilities to your earthly family and we pray that our earthly family becomes our spiritual family, but stand aware that the Lord is saying your true family are those who come to Jesus.

Now, what does that kind of love look like? How do you walk that out? Three commitments and the first commitment there in Ephesians 4, we need to make a commitment to bear with one another in love. First point, bear with one another in love. Key participle or verb in verse 2, New American Standard says "with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love." That's an unfortunate translation of that word. It literally means "to hold up; to have and to hold up against opposition; the desire to let go." And I think the other translations all get it better here, NIV, SV, King James, it's "bearing with one another." That's a better English word; tolerance is kind of emptied of meaning these days. It means to hold up when it's difficult to stay in there.

And he speaks of the attitudes. Don't you look at the attitudes? He says, listen, to do this, to bear with one another in love, you need to have, and he talks about three key attitudes, with all humility, gentleness, and patience. The word "humility" can be translated more

literally, "lowly minded." That's literally what it says in the Greek, "low minded or lowly minded." It means to see yourself not as a person of exalted stature but lowliness. This is what we are called to do because the one that we follow was the one who said he came, the Son of man did not come to be served but to serve. He came to live a life as a lowly servant. So those who belong to him are to set this as their baseline of how they think about themselves, how we think about ourselves.

We are to see ourselves as lowly servants with all meekness. Gentleness could be translated better meekness. The idea of this isn't just the outward gentleness, it is that, but it's an inner attitude that sees whatever happens to me as coming from God. Therefore, a person who is meek is very hard to offend. Almost impossible. It doesn't mean that you could get offended for God's honor and God's name is not being meek, but personally, it's hard to step on someone's toes. You know, one of the things that is true, we sometimes you'll hear someone say, "We have big toes. My toes are too big." What's that mean? "Well, I find it easy for people to step on them. I take offense too quickly." We're supposed to, if we're going to walk out this kind of love, we're going to bear with one another, it requires that we actively change our mindset by God's grace. We pray about this regularly, "Lord, help me to be a servant, to be lowly minded. Help me to be hard to offend, not easy to offend, not quick tempered."

And then the word "patience," and here again, I think a better translation is "long suffering." That's what it says in the Greek, "suffering long." So he's saying with all humility and gentleness, with patience, you could say with all lowly mindedness and meekness, with long suffering, bearing with one another in love. Long suffering. I mean, you're willing to suffer long. Isn't it interesting, you know, you think about the great chapter on love in the Bible, 1 Corinthians 13, 16 references to describe what love is in that passage, 1 Corinthians 13:4 to 8. They're all verbs. They don't translate like verbs in English because it's sometimes hard. In fact, the first one is love is patient. First one, what is love like? Do you know what love is like? Love suffers long. That's the first characteristic of agape love. It suffers long. That is, that you so want to love someone that you're willing to suffer for it and not just for a little while, for a long time. You know, life is messy. Relationships are hard. God knows that in a fallen world where though we have all of this, the richness of the bounty of what Christ has done for us, we are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation of people belonging to God, we've been taken out of darkness into his marvelous light, and yet we have this treasure in earthen vessels and we have to kill the flesh, we have to kill sin on a daily basis. And so you put, as Ernie Baker says, wherever two or three are gathered in my name, there will be conflict. Conflict's a part of life.

So if you want to live out this kind of love in the world with other fellow redeemed sinners, you have to make a commitment to bear with one another. You've got to make a commitment to hold up and stand up under the difficulty. Are you willing to stay in there and suffer long? Let me ask you, how quickly do you give up on others? Someone hurts you, "I'm not going to let that happen again." That's not love. Remember when Peter asked Jesus, "How many times must I forgive my brother? Up to seven times?" Peter was really, you know, he was always out there being bold. He was really thinking, "This is

great. I'm going to, I know I'm getting the message. You're saying we're supposed to be loving and forgiving and I see it now. And so I would even forgive somebody seven times, right Lord?" And Jesus says, "70 times seven. Your brother sins and comes and asks forgiveness, forgive him. He sins and comes and asks forgiveness again, forgive him. He sins and comes and asks forgiveness again, forgive him. Don't hold it against him." Now there are other verses in Scripture to speak about. Maybe you need to help him with his sin, but you don't withhold fellowship from him. You don't treat him as a second-class citizen because of what he did to you. You don't hold him at arm's length, you bring him close to your heart.

Love suffers long and so if we're lowly minded and meek and we're willing to suffer long, then we can bear with one another in love. This is what we're called to do. And isn't it true that the more you get to know anybody, you know, it's amazing how this is just so true and as you get older, as we're getting older, many of you that are older like me, you know you've learned this, that people always look better from a distance. Right? "Man, I'd like to hang out with that guy. He is just on fire for the Lord." And then you get with him and you hang out for a while and you're like, "He's got some problems." And over time you realize that, "Oh yes, I keep forgetting that." It's always that way. You know, we'll ruin a friendship, you want to ruin a friendship? Room together. Right? If you're not going to walk in the power of grace, you can ruin a friendship. But if you live together, you room together, you're going to have a lot of opportunities to practice this, bearing with one another in love. So you've got to make a commitment not to run when things get tough but to realize now is the time that agape love can flow. You don't really need agape love when the person's acting lovely and lovable. When everything's great, you don't need to rely upon the love of God, but when things get tough, now there's an opportunity.

So bear with one another in love. Secondly, the second commitment we need to make if we're going to see this kind of love lived out in our life, if we're going to love our true family as a way of life, is we need to speak the truth to one another in love. Verse 15, "but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ." He's describing a situation where the body is growing up in the corporate body, that is the church as a whole, the body of believers, the local fellowship is learning to, is being equipped and is serving one another and is building up one another and growing in unity and growing in more and more likeness to Christ corporately but there are challenges. Verse 14, "As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming." There's all kinds of opposition that we have to deal with and how do you deal with the opposition? You speak the truth in love.

We're called to speak the truth to one another. We need this. This is vital that the truth be spoken. You and I desperately need other people to speak the truth to us. You need to be reading your Bible, studying your Bible. Yes, you need to let God speak to you through his word, but there will be many, many, many things that you will not learn unless you listen to another believer teach you and speak the truth to you. If you're going to be a Lone Ranger Christian, you're going to be not a very holy Christian. You need people who see your weaknesses and who speak the truth to you in love. That's what I need. And

we're to humble ourselves under the word. The Lord loves to do this. I mean, it's his idea of how he purifies his people. He makes it so that we have to hear his word from other people.

It's really amazing when you stop and think about it. You remember God spoke to the nation of Israel at Sinai when they had left Egypt. He spoke out of heaven, and the people just freaked out and they told, Moses, "Please don't let Him do that anymore. No, you tell us what He says. Don't let us hear Him." And God says that what they said is right, because he was just showing them, "You don't want Me to speak to you out of heaven. So what I'm going to do is I'm going to make a prophet, I'm going to make a man a prophet, call him to Myself, I'm going to put My words in his mouth and then he's going to speak to other human beings and he's going to give them the word of God." And that's how about we have this Bible, 66 books, more than 40 different human authors, inspired by the Spirit, yes, every word's perfect, every word's directly from God, but it came through a human being and his own personality and his own life experience. It's still perfect, but it's a human book as much as it's a divine book. Divine without error. 100% perfect and yet human all the way.

Now what's going on there? John Calvin says... well, let me say one more thing before I share the John Calvin quote. So then you have a Canon that's closed, you have the word, and what the Lord tells us in all these "one anothers" like this one, speak the truth in love, teach one another, admonish one another, encourage one another, comfort one another with these words, what's he saying? You need to listen to other people speak the word of God. It's his pattern from the beginning to put his words in some other human being's mouth to speak to you and there are some things you will never get if you're not willing to listen to people around you speak the truth to you.

Calvin's quote, he says, he's talking about preaching, which is still, this is one of the amazing things that God speaks through a preacher. We gather together and sit and listen to one guy who's nothing special in every church around the globe, we're just all fellow sheep, but the Lord points one guy to speak and preach on Sunday mornings in Bible teaching churches like our church, people sit and listen to the word of God spoken like that because God has ordained that, the foolishness of preaching. Why has he ordained that? Calvin says this. He says it would show some measure of humility and reverence if God spoke out of heaven and you obeyed him, but when a puny man, but when a puny man risen from the dust who excels you in no way, speaks the word of God to you, you show yourself humble by placing yourself under that word. There's something powerful about using human instruments. Our greatest problem is pride, isn't it? Charles Spurgeon said the first sin to be evident in the life of a newborn is pride and the last thing before they put you in the ground is pride.

And so God has deemed that we need each other to speak the truth in love, and you need, and I need, to be quick to listen. Now sometimes you're going to do it, often you're going to do it, and initially you're going to be misunderstood, mischaracterized. Sometimes when you speak the truth, you see someone has a need, a spiritual need, and you speak the truth in love to them, they're going to think when you reprove them, and the Bible

talks about that, love is reproof, that is, showing someone where their error is, rebuking, correcting, instructing. You and I need other people to reprove us. We need other people to rebuke us. We need other people to instruct us. We need other people to correct us. In fact, I think it's just so cool how God did this and just makes it so clear. What are the two great commandments? Love God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind. Second commandment is like unto it, love your neighbor as yourself. First commandment is from Deuteronomy 6:5. The second commandment is from Leviticus 19:18. Love your neighbor as yourself. Do you know what 19:17 says, Leviticus 19:17? Listen to this. Right before it says love your neighbor as yourself, it says in verse 17, "You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You may surely reprove your neighbor." Do you get that? If you hate your brother in your heart, you will not reprove him. Love your neighbor as yourself. Don't you want somebody to tell you when you're wrong so you can stop being wrong? You don't want to keep going being wrong all your life, right?

But sometimes people are going to misunderstand that. You're going to reprove them and your motivation is truly love. Now we never do it perfectly. There's always some measure of sin. So we realize when somebody comes to reprove us, they're not going to do it a 100% right but if we're looking and trusting that God's going to speak to me through other people that he's put in my family, I need to be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to anger. He's going to show me something valuable and it may be that after they correct me, that now humbled and seen more clearly, I now have something that I can share with them. But it's not because tit for tat. It's because love means helping one another, serving one another. One of the hardest things about this is sometimes you will be misperceived completely. People will think when you come to approve them that you are hating them when in fact you are loving them.

I heard something the other day that was really helpful talking to Jack and Barbara Enter. Listen to this, think about this, write this down, something that they shared that they'd heard somewhere. "I'd rather be thought of as unkind while being kind than be thought of as kind while being unkind." Let me say it again, "I'd rather be thought of as unkind while being kind than to be thought of as kind while being unkind." Do you see the difference? If you're concerned about how people think about you rather than what God thinks, kindness is not niceness. Niceness is politeness and just kind of doing the culturally acceptable thing. Don't offend anybody. Just be nice. That's not kindness. Kindness seeks the good of the other. It's akin to love, but it's to seek to bless. And so if you bring a word of reproof that someone perceives as unkindness, but you know in your heart you're being kind, you would rather them think you're unkind while you try to serve them and speak truth than for them to think you're kind while you hold your tongue and hate them in your heart. Do you see that? It doesn't mean you really just despise them, but to hate them in the heart means you love yourself more than you love them, you love your reputation more than you love their soul and that is to despise or hate them.

Are you willing to speak hard words to others for their good? That's what love does and it's even willing to suffer for it. Are you willing, this is even maybe harder for us, are you willing to receive hard words from others? Are you ready to do that and to look and hope

for the best and expect that God is speaking to you and in meekness be slow, be hard to offend? You know, when someone comes to you and you think they're wrong with what they're saying, I don't mean you say, "Yeah, whatever you say, whatever you think is right." No. But a good gracious response is to say when somebody comes with a word of reproof, the first thing that ought to come out of our mouth is, "Thank you for caring enough about me to come and talk with me about this. I know this had to be difficult for you." Because for most people it is. If they're really truly a believer, it was hard to come. And even if they're 98% wrong, I don't think they're ever 100% wrong, but 98% is pretty bad. I mean, they're only 2% right, right? But you can still say, "Thank you for caring about me enough to come to me. It means a lot to me." And even that starts preparing your heart to let that come in a little better because our natural disposition in our flesh pride, pride, pride. Someone comes, we want to put up the defenses. We're already thinking about our response. But the right way, a meek person, a lowly minded person, a person willing to suffer long says, "I want to hear you because I think God is at work all around me in the body of Christ. You're a person who professes to follow Jesus. You're my brother, you're my sister. Please speak to me." And then you can say, if you think it's only 2% right on initial thought, a lot of times that 2% becomes 20% later when you think about it though, but even if you think it's only 2%, you can say this, "Thank you. I'm not sure I fully understand that, but I'm going to consider that carefully and prayerfully and I'll get back with you on that. Thank you, though, for telling me."

I think that's a godly response and if we love one another, we're going to do that. We're going to speak the truth and we're going to receive the speaking of the truth, and we're going to realize that God is just glorified. Listen, like I said, there are things that, you know, it's amazing and to me, especially as a pastor, you know, you prepare messages and you talk about things and you say it and then later somebody else says to you what you've already said and it, like, sinks in. "Thank you for saying that." And it's true for all Christians. If you're a good student of the Bible, don't you find people telling you things you already know but which you so desperately needed to hear and forgotten? And the Lord wants us to be a community of people who are willing to get in each other's lives and be long-suffering and bear with one another and speak the truth in love.

And finally, the last thing, the last commitment. So we're committed to bear with one another in love. Second commitment, speak the truth to one another in love. Thirdly, build up one another in love. Verse 16, "from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love." Building up, it's basically a compound word of two words. It really means build house, build the house. We don't have that idiom in English, so it turns into building up. We're called to house build and think the idea is you're building each local, each individual person is a house of God. So you're called to remember the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. The person's life, they become the dwelling of God now. So you're to build and edify them so they become even more effective as the building they are but you're also building up the big house, the temple, which is the church.

And the idea is, listen, what do you do when you see a need? When you see a deficiency in somebody and individually, or when you see a deficiency in the body, you see a weakness, you see a lack, you see something that's just not as it ought to be, what is your mindset toward that? This is saying that if we're going to show the supernatural love of God, what it needs to be, we need to have the mindset of a builder. It's so important, I think, especially in a society like ours but it's true in every time and every season and every place. Do you think of yourself as a servant? Do you think of yourself as a builder? Do you think of yourself as a consumer? That is, when when you find a deficiency, if you're shopping at some particular store and you find a deficiency in that store, they don't have this or that, they don't do this well, they don't do that, what do you do? You go to a different store and there's nothing wrong with that. I mean, you're being a wise consumer. Some people treat church like that. They come to see, like I said, churches look really good from the... I always try, I need to do more of this in the profile class, like, "Hey, just get ready, we're going to disappoint." I do say that, but I need to say it more emphatically. "I'm telling you, we're going to disappoint you. Just get ready for it. And it's going to happen a lot."

But when you see problems, when you see weaknesses, when you see deficiencies, what are you to do? How do you respond? Do you immediately think about leaving? Or do you realize that this is an opportunity to build? God has shown me an area that I need to get to work in. You know, individually, we see needs in people and they can drive us away but what we should always be doing is moving toward a need. How can I edify? How can I build up this brother or sister? And corporately the same way, how can I be about addressing this need? And you've got to be ready as you get into that it's still going to be messy because you're working with other people who are just as sinful as you. I mean, we all have a sin nature. I don't mean to make it exact equivalency across the board, but we all have a sin nature. We all sin every day and we all need to cling to Christ continually to walk in victory.

You think about if we make the commitment to bear with one another in love, that we know that we need to be lowly minded, meek, hard to offend, willing to suffer long because life is messy, and we're committed to, as we see needs around us, to speak the truth in love, and as we see problems and areas of lack, we're willing not to leave, but to build, and you get a group of people that are bearing with one another in love, lowly minded, as Paul says in Philippians 2:3, not looking out for your own interests, but also for the interests of others, having this mind in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who taking the form of a servant and becoming made in human likeness, I mean, coming in the form of a man, he lived his life as a slave and gave himself up on the cross. If we have that mind, and we're determined to speak the truth and love, even if it means people initially misunderstanding and thinking we don't love them, but we stay at it with them and we keep loving them even though they're having a hard time with that, and when things are messed up, we're in there building. If you have a group of people like that, do you know what happens? People come around that and they see the supernatural power of Jesus Christ. They can't understand that, how you can bear with one another through these things. And what happens is when you offend another brother, you know what it is? It's an opportunity for a deeper relationship than you've ever had before because where

sin abounds, there does grace much more abound. He shed abroad his love in our hearts and if we pour out our hearts in love and we stay at it, on the other side, I mean, when you have seen, when you've been through something with somebody, they've offended you and you've now forgiven them and they know that your heart is open to them, there is a bond that is deeper than you ever had before. And we should be a body of people because we're getting each other's lives, we're going to be offending each other, we're going to be hurting each other, we're going to have to work through things, we're going to have to do it biblically, we're going to have to go speak to them, not about them, but when we go and we speak to them and we love them, God's going to be with us. His Spirit's going to work. It's going to take time because he teaches us through the bearing, through the hanging in there, through the waiting, through the trusting him. But more and more and more, we're going to look like Jesus. The world's going to see it. They're going to come in among us and say, "Surely God is among you." And the powers of hell are going to be, they're going to be humiliated by this kind of love and Jesus is going to be lifted up. This is what we're called to do. Love the brotherhood. Love those that belong to you in Christ.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, how grateful we are for the beauty of the gospel. Lord, we think about what Paul said later in chapter 3 of Ephesians when he prayed that we might be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge that you might be filled up to all the fullness of God. Lord, we pray that You would do that in each of our hearts and in this community, this temple, this church. Lord, we thank You that it's not about who we are. We can't do this. And we thank You that even as Paul prayed that, he then said he knew it had to be by Your grace. He said, "Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever, amen." It's only because You're able to do above and beyond all we ask or imagine that we even offer that prayer, and we rejoice that we know that we're asking something completely in accordance with Your will we pray like this. Jesus said to the Father on the night before He was crucified, after He talked to the disciples about loving one another, He said, "Lord, I pray that they may be one even as We are One." Lord Jesus, make that true. Help us for Your glory. We pray in Your name. Amen.