

THE ONE ANOTHERS

Together to Make Much of Christ

In all of creation, there is only one institution that has been charged with the high responsibility of knowing and making known the person and work of Jesus Christ. That one institution is His *church*. For this reason, the church stands above every other institution under heaven for the promotion of God's glory and the joy of humanity for both now and forever.

We orient our lives to what we truly value. If Christ and His church are precious to us, it will be reflected in the choices that shape our lifestyle. While the church may not always be distinguished by *what* she does in the world, she must always be distinguished by *why* she does it. Christ is our 'why'. Our theme, then, is: *The church exists to make much of Christ, not the church.*

The church lives and moves and has her being to make much of Christ. The way we relate to one another serves this great end.

ONE IMPORTANT GREEK WORD

56 occurrences in 52 verses, grouped into 2 relational declarations and 31 relational responsibilities.

What follows is a biblical study prompted by one reciprocal pronoun, which illustrates the rich relational nature of Christians—principally Christians within the same local church. It is structured around a list of fifty-two verses, each containing this one important Greek word that is translated “one another” (*allēlōn*). It is a special word that is often used in a technical sense to designate a particular relationship and relational dynamics. While it is occasionally used in a generic sense, mostly in narratives, it is employed fifty-six times in the New Testament in the technical sense. In each of these cases, the term testifies to the special relationship created between the members of a local church—a relationship that was purchased by Christ.

These “one anothers” are situated in declarations and commands. But this does not mean that the following list is comprehensive of all declarations and commands concerning the relationship of individuals in Christ's churches. There are many other descriptions, statements, and imperatives given to the one anothers of the church without the use of this word. But for our purposes here, we have limited our study to only those declarations and commands that are explicitly attached to this one important word.

These are not abstract ideals; they are concrete responsibilities to be lived-out in the context of the local church. These are not man-made obligations; they are divinely inspired traits of Christlikeness. It is not a list of man-centered ethics; it is a spectrum of God-centered provision for the blessedness of Christ's redeemed—divine ethics for the only God-centered community on earth.

As used in the following passages of Scripture, this word is uniquely a word of *relationship* and *responsibility* to the church, exercised for the glory of God and the joy of all in Him.

A WORD OF RELATIONSHIP

1. WE HAVE FELLOWSHIP WITH ONE ANOTHER

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 cleanses us from all sin.
— 1 John 1:7 —

The invisible realities that course through this statement are deeply profound. Tragically, they are all too often undervalued. Within the meaning of these few words exists a revolutionary concept; the answer to a universal predicament, the hope of the ages, and the final resolution of all division, strife, enmity, and death. The idea is massive. God is at the center, Christ is the means, the Holy Spirit is the agent, the gospel is the key, and joy-filled fellowship is the outcome.

Christian fellowship is unique among every other fellowship in the world. But we cannot set ourselves up over and against other people because what we share in common makes much of God, not us. The local church is designed to constitute a unique society of a new humanity that is God-centered. Other associations and partnerships are founded on something that they share in common. But Christian fellowship is distinguished. It stands in contrast to every other brotherhood, association, society, organization, common cause, interest group, or campaign. Christian fellowship begins with, is sustained by, and ultimately serves to promote God and His glory—in short, it is salvation-based and God-centered.

In the final analysis, Christian fellowship embodies and exemplifies the ministry of the one anothers.

2. WE ARE MEMBERS OF ONE ANOTHER

So we, though many, are one body in Christ, and **individually members one of another**.
— Romans 12:5 —

Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for **we are members one of another**.
— Ephesians 4:25 —

Church membership represents a precious reality, namely the bond of Christ-centered love. Rightly understood, it demands an exceedingly high view of Christ. Membership is not merely a name on a roster, but your life organically joined to the lives of those whom God has allotted among us; our “one anothers.”

The principle of membership in a nutshell is this: *they devoted themselves to **the** fellowship* (Acts 2:42). This speaks of a determinative investment in a shared or “common” life, a “common salvation” (Jude 3), a “communion” of saints. This was no “easy come, easy go” Christianity. Commitment protects love, and where there is no or only weak commitment there is very little strength of love.

The gospel is more than establishing a right relationship with God; it joins diversities of people together into samples of a whole new humanity. In Christ, we are a new humanity, and our fellowship should be marked by holistic devotion to Christ *and* one another. Church membership

exists to make much, not of the church, but of Christ—Christ glorified on earth through transformed lives committed together in gospel love.

A WORD OF RESPONSIBILITY

3. LOVE ONE ANOTHER

A new commandment I give to you, that you **love one another**: just as I have loved you, you also are to **love one another**. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you **have love for one another**.

— John 13:34-35 —

(Also: John 15:12, 17; Romans 12:10; 13:8; 1 Thessalonians 3:12; 4:9; 2 Thessalonians 1:3; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11, 12; 2 John 5)

The hallmark of Christ's redeemed is love—specifically love to God and love to *one another*. It is the highest interpersonal expression of Christlikeness. Love occupies more than 30% of the *one anothers*. It towers over every other responsibility given to the church, occurring more than five times as often as any other *one another* statement.

On the night He was betrayed, Christ repeatedly emphasized the chief responsibility of His chosen ones, namely that they love one another. He said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you **love one another**: just as I have loved you, you also are to **love one another**. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have **love for one another**” (John 13:34-35). Later that same night, He said, “This is My commandment, that you **love one another**, just as I have loved you” (John 15:12). And again, “This I command you, that you **love one another**” (John 15:17). The Apostle Paul reminds us that as a local church we are to “be **devoted to one another in brotherly love**” (Romans 12:10) and are to “owe nothing to anyone except to **love one another**; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law” (Romans 13:8).

No church has ever arrived; no church can lay claim to fulfilling the depth and height of this responsibility. Even those who genuinely love one another, Christ will take them to new depths and levels of love that they could not have anticipated. Paul tells the church in Thessalonica, “may the Lord cause you to **increase and abound in love for one another**” (1 Thessalonians 3:12). He acknowledges their express demonstration of such love, and yet urges them to excel still more: “Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to **love one another**, for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more” (1 Thessalonians 4:9-10). Later he writes to them, “We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the **love of each one of you toward one another** grows ever greater” (2 Thessalonians 1:3). The Apostle Peter writes to the redeemed in Christ, even in the midst of persecution, “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**” (1 Peter 1:22). The Apostle John plainly states, “For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should **love one another**” (1 John 3:11). Later he writes, “not as though I were writing to you a

new commandment, but the one which we have had from the beginning, that we **love one another**" (2 John 5).

This responsibility is so essential it is placed in juxtaposition to our faith in Christ: "This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and **love one another**, just as He commanded us" (1 John 3:23). At once we see a relationship between faith in Christ and love to one another. The order matters. It is inferred that the one grows out of the other as the effect out of the cause. This resembles the foremost commandment of God and its immediate second: *to love God* and *to love one another*. After uttering these words, Jesus said, "There is no other commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:31), thereby reiterating the preeminent importance of love. This responsibility is bound to the very nature of regeneration: "Beloved, let us **love one another**, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God" (1 John 4:7). It follows the pattern of God and supremely reflects His presence in us: "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to **love one another**. No one has seen God at any time; if we **love one another**, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us" (1 John 4:10-12).

So love is commanded by God (1 Thess 4:9) and set forth in the example of Christ (Eph 5:2). It is the fruit of His Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22) and proceeds from a pure heart (1 Pet 1:22). Faith itself works through love (Gal 5:6). Love is the fulfillment of the law (Rom 13:8), essential to true happiness (Prov 15:17), and is considered the bond of perfect peace (Col 3:14). B. B. Warfield rightly said, "Self-sacrificing love is thus made the essence of the Christian life."

We love one another because we are a spiritual family. If you struggle loving people in your local church, seek out Christ in them. Look and listen for Christ in them; by this we shall find cause to love them. When you do not feel like going out of your way to love people in your local church, remind yourself that you are not responsible *to feel like loving*, you are responsible *to love*. This does not diminish the value of godly affections; it simply puts them in their place. Feelings should not be given authority over our choices. As *disciples* of Christ, we must *discipline* our thoughts to act in accordance with what is right and not merely what we feel. We must pray for God-centered affections for one another and desire that our hearts would be inclined to Christ and His redeemed. Those who are your *one anothers* are your spiritual family. Love them because of your relationship to them in Christ.

Love should be our hallmark, because we should represent Jesus to everyone we encounter. In fact, love must be the atmosphere in which each of the following responsibilities is lived out.

4. HAVE THE SAME CARE FOR ONE ANOTHER

God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may **have the same care for one another**.

— 1 Corinthians 12:25 —

One great reason why so many churches do so little good is that members are so little concerned for the spiritual welfare of one another. Just as a strong and capable man may be rendered quite limited in his usefulness when ill, so a local church is prone to suffer in like manner when it fails this responsibility: "have the same care for one another." Such sickness is most likely to result when

members do not lay to heart, and discern with attention, the spiritual relationship they share with those joined in the fellowship of Christ among them—those with whom the Holy Spirit has joined together in the communion and partnership of the gospel among them. Every local church is vulnerable to sickness, yet passages like this one are given to stimulate the spiritual immune system of the local body of Christ.

5. LIVE IN HARMONY WITH ONE ANOTHER

Live in harmony with one another.

Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.

— Romans 12:16 —

May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to **live in such harmony with one another**, in accord with Christ Jesus.

— Romans 15:5 —

The cause of all disharmony is sin; and at the heart of sin is wrong thinking—and our manner of thought is no one's fault but our own. Yet, God redeems and reconciles, through the gospel, radically transforming relationships. The gospel of grace is received by faith for the forgiveness of rebellious thinking, and is received in power for the regeneration of the rebel mind. Our thinking and our relationships are linked, and therefore the impact the gospel has on our minds should profoundly affect our relationships. The application of the gospel to our thinking for the sake of living in harmony with one another is the focus of this chapter. The two occurrences of the one anothers listed above stress two foundational principles for living in harmony: *right thinking* and *gospel humility*.

6. BE KIND TO ONE ANOTHER

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted ...

— Ephesians 4:32 —

Kindness is rarely explained. More than that, members in the local church are here called to *be*—or better, *become*—something rather than *do* something. It speaks of a responsibility of cultivation, to become what they are not at the present.

There is a progression in Ephesians 4:32. Behind the terrible cross is a kind and tender heart motivated by love. God in kindness, not law, is what brought us forgiveness. God's gracious love in Christ is the ultimate kindness, being our example. Kindness is a heart matter and in us it must be cultivated. It is a very down-to-earth, practical, tangible, useful demonstration of love.

7. BE TENDERHEARTED TO ONE ANOTHER

Be kind to one another, **tenderhearted** ...

— Ephesians 4:32 —

To be tenderhearted is to be compassionate, having tender feelings for one another. This means that Christian love is more than a verb, it necessarily involves the heart. It speaks of one's affection for another that compels action, and particularly as one is readily touched by the weakness or failings of another.

8. CONFESS YOUR SINS TO ONE ANOTHER

... confess your sins to one another ...
— James 5:16 —

Sin is never committed in a vacuum and it never affects only the sinner. Sin affects the whole church, whether seen or not, often leading to injurious infection. The call to confess our sins to one another is a call to honestly steward the health of Christ's Bride. This responsibility requires that we view sin as utterly sinful and understand that the need to confess is bigger than us and our personal feelings and reputations. It makes much of Christ through the gospel of forgiveness, and when rightly exercised engenders a mutual care and accountability of the collective spiritual health of Christ's church.

9. FORGIVE ONE ANOTHER

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, **forgiving one another**, as God in Christ forgave you.
— Ephesians 4:32 —

Bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, **forgiving each other**; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.
— Colossians 3:13 —

Forgiveness has been called the virtue we profess to believe, fail to practice, and neglect to preach. Forgiveness is an overloaded, undervalued, and largely misunderstood grace. Forgiveness is fundamentally Christian. It is not merely done better or made easier with Christ; it cannot exist apart from Christ. This is because forgiveness is not only hard it is impossible in the economy of justice. Only in Christ, through the gospel, is forgiveness possible without finally sacrificing justice. Forgiveness, then, is the trademark of Christian love. Applying this to the local church, we must always remember that our actions towards those we love should be driven by love, not justice. The forgiven cannot but forgive one another.

10. BEAR WITH ONE ANOTHER

With all humility and gentleness, with patience, **bearing with one another** in love.
— Ephesians 4:2 —

Bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.
— Colossians 3:13 —

Forbearance is an act that puts the gospel on display in the power of faith, grace, and love within a transformed heart. Forbearance makes much of Christ instead of the offense. It is love, being motivated by love and epitomizing love without conditions. It is love of the most difficult kind, chiefly because love of this sort is rarely acknowledged, existing only in brokenness. It is a costly love that promises no earthly return on investment.

As sinners we cherish grace, and forbearance is a particular kind of grace. All grace is relational, but forbearance is that grace which overtly carries relationships through conflict. Forbearance graciously demonstrates that relationships matter more. When conflict enters to divide, forbearance *bears* or *carries* the relationship along in the hope of future restoration and peace.

11. BE AT PEACE WITH ONE ANOTHER

Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and **be at peace with one another**.

— Mark 9:50 —

So then let us **pursue what makes for peace** and for mutual upbuilding.

— Romans 14:19 —

Even the redeemed remain sinners while in this flesh and world. The commands that exhort us to peace will not take effect until Christ, and Him crucified and raised, is at the center of our thinking. God redeems sinners in tremendous love for their benefit. He then puts them together and intends them to love one another for the benefit of one another. God expects the gospel to transform the way that we treat one another, and ultimately all people.

12. HONOR ONE ANOTHER

Love one another with brotherly affection. **Outdo one another in showing honor**.

— Romans 12:10 —

This command is concerned with the outworking and quality of love within the household of God. If love is to be our hallmark (John 13:35), unfeigned and without prejudice, then it will be preceded by *humility* and expressed in *honor*. Whatever our expression of love to one another may be, if it is true, it will be clothed in a humility that seeks the truest honor of the other.

The currency of brotherly love is honor. In fact, the word used for “honor” is sometimes employed to describe a price paid or received (cf. Acts 4:34; 5:2; 7:16; etc.). It is the basis of our word “honorarium”—payment made out of respect for a service given. From this monetary connotation, we get the meaning of valuing or esteeming. Our love within the church is to deliberately show forth one another’s value; it is to publish statements of one another’s worth in both word and deed. We are to respect one another with a peculiarity unexplainable by human convention. This is no backscratcher mentality—“I’ll scratch your back if you scratch mine.” There is no self-seeking in this duty. No secret agenda. It is selfless and otherward. It is not natural but rather gospel borne. In this way, the honor that is here called for is to be understood “as an advantage to be given by believers one to another instead of claiming it for self.”

13. REGARD ONE ANOTHER AS MORE IMPORTANT THAN SELF

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility **count others more significant than yourselves**.

— Philippians 2:3 —

To genuinely show forth the value of one another is virtuous and pleasing to God. To advertise your own honor, place yourself first, blow your own horn, solicit attention, publish statements of self-worth, and seek glory from men is corrupt and displeasing to God.

In every detail of the revelation of God in the Son’s coming there exists an unmistakable and grand antithesis to selfish ambition. The cross is a divine parody against human pride. These two principals are at odds: self and Christ. Either one is preeminent and the other denied supremacy or

vice-versa. We either deny self or Christ when the impulse of self tempts us. We should be willing to suffer for the sake of Christ.

14. STIR UP ONE ANOTHER TO LOVE AND GOOD DEEDS

And let us consider how to **stir up one another to love and good works** ...
— Hebrews 10:24 —

15. EDIFY ONE ANOTHER

So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for **mutual upbuilding**.
— Romans 14:19 —

Therefore encourage one another and **build one another up**, just as you are doing.
— 1 Thessalonians 5:11 —

16. ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER

Therefore **encourage one another** with these words.
— 1 Thessalonians 4:18 —

Therefore **encourage one another** and build one another up, just as you are doing.
— 1 Thessalonians 5:11 —

... that we may be **mutually encouraged** by each other's faith ...
— Romans 1:12 —

17. BEAR ONE ANOTHER'S BURDENS

Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.
— Galatians 6:2 —

18. PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER

Therefore, confess your sins to one another and **pray for one another**, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.
— James 5:16 —

19. ADMONISH ONE ANOTHER

And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to **admonish one another**.
— Romans 15:14 (NASB) —

20. SUBMIT TO ONE ANOTHER

submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.
— Ephesians 5:21 —

21. SERVE ONE ANOTHER

For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love **serve one another**.
— Galatians 5:13 —

22. ALWAYS SEEK TO DO GOOD TO ONE ANOTHER

See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but **always seek to do good to one another** and to everyone.
— 1 Thessalonians 5:15 —

23. ACCEPT ONE ANOTHER

Therefore **welcome one another** as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.
— Romans 15:7 —

24. GREET ONE ANOTHER

Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.
— Romans 16:16 —

All the brothers send you greetings. **Greet one another** with a holy kiss.
— 1 Corinthians 16:20 —

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

Greet one another with the kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ.
— 1 Peter 5:14 —

25. SHOW HOSPITALITY TO ONE ANOTHER

Show hospitality to **one another** without grumbling.
— 1 Peter 4:9 —

26. WAIT FOR ONE ANOTHER

So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, **wait for one another** ...
— 1 Corinthians 11:33 —

27. DO NOT JUDGE ONE ANOTHER

Therefore **let us not pass judgment on one another** any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.
— Romans 14:13 —

28. DO NOT PROVOKE ONE ANOTHER

Let us **not** become conceited, **provoking one another** ...
— Galatians 5:26 —

29. DO NOT ENVY ONE ANOTHER

Let us **not** become conceited, provoking one another, **envying one another**.
— Galatians 5:26 —

30. DO NOT LIE TO ONE ANOTHER

Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices ...
— Colossians 3:9 —

31. DO NOT GRUMBLE AGAINST ONE ANOTHER

Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.
— James 5:9 —

32. DO NOT SPEAK EVIL AGAINST ONE ANOTHER

Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge.
— James 4:11 —

33. BE HUMBLE TOWARD ONE ANOTHER

Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. **Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another**, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”
— 1 Peter 5:5 —

There are some who are always looking for the perfect Church of Christ; but they have not seen it yet. When Eve was in the making, Adam did not see her; it was only when she was complete that she became visible; and to-day, the real Church of Christ is only in the making, and when she has been fashioned out of the side of Christ, then she will be presented to him without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing. All the various agencies which God has appointed are working together for the fashioning of this perfect body of the Church.

...

Give yourself to the church. You that are members of the church have not found it perfect, and I hope that you feel almost glad that you have not. If I had never joined a church till I had found one that was perfect, I should never have joined one at all; and the moment I did join it, if I had found one, I should have spoiled it, for it would not have been a perfect church after I had become a member of it. Still, imperfect as it is, it is the dearest place on earth to us.

— Charles H. Spurgeon