

Our Duty to One Another

M.W. Bassford
12-16-07

Introduction.

- A. It's probably fair to say that Americans are not a very history-conscious people, and one of the reasons why we aren't is because we aren't surrounded by evidence of history the way that people in other nations are. In Joliet, if a building is 150 years old, we put it on the National Registry of Historic Places. Most Europeans, though, would look at that and laugh, because 150 years ago is like yesterday to them.
- B. In Europe, of course, there are buildings that are not decades, not centuries, but thousands of years old. Like the Coliseum on the screen behind me, many of those buildings were built by the ancient Romans. The reason why those buildings are still around when many newer ones have already fallen into ruin is because the Romans used the arch in their construction. In an arch, every block in the construction is falling over, but the way that they're falling, they're actually falling into each other, so the pressure of the gravity that's pulling them down actually keeps them upright and together. They'll last until their stones crumble to dust.
- C. In many ways, the arch is a wonderful metaphor for the Lord's church. Just like gravity, Satan is constantly trying to pull us down, and if any of us were spiritually isolated, Satan would surely succeed. However, just like an architect positions individual stones into an arch, so God has positioned individual Christians in His church. Each congregation, friends, is a mutual support society. Just like the stones in an arch, each one of us depends on other Christians to keep from falling. Similarly, every Christian has a responsibility to do his part to keep the others upright, and if we don't do our share, the whole thing may collapse. God doesn't just expect us to take care of ourselves; He expects us to take care of the others with whom we worship. With this in mind, let's spend some time this morning looking at what the Bible says about our duty to one another.

I. Our Attitude toward One Another.

- A. The first thing that God requires us to do for one another is to **LOVE ONE ANOTHER**. One of the things that I like to pay attention to in Scripture, friends, are the things that God repeats. Everything that He says is important, of course, but one of the techniques that God uses to emphasize the REALLY important stuff is repetition. Something that's very important gets said twice, something that's extremely important gets said three times, and so forth. By contrast, the command to love one another is repeated 12 times. I believe it is the most repeated command in the Bible, which may well make it the most important command in the Bible.
- B. We see one of these repetitions from the lips of Jesus in John 13:34. He tells us here that we are not to love one another in a half-hearted, inconsistent way. We are to love one another as Christ has loved us. Jesus is totally invested in us. He loves us with all of His intellect, all of His will, and all of His emotions. That's the way that we need to love one another: with everything that we can possibly bring to bear. The most important things on this planet to us need to be our brothers and sisters in Christ, because that's what we were to Jesus. In fact, it's fair to say that every other "one another" command is an application of this one.
- C. One of these applications is that we are to **BE LIKE-MINDED TOWARD ONE ANOTHER**. Paul makes this point in Romans 15:5. Here's what he means by this: In the first-century church, there were two main groups of people: Jews and Gentiles. These two groups had never had anything to do with each other before, so in the Lord's church, they still had a tendency to hang back from one another. Paul is telling them that they can't do that. Instead, they have to look at one another and see not Jews or Gentiles, but Christians.
- D. In the same way, friends, we need to learn to be like-minded toward one another. Just as there were in the first century, there are plenty of barriers that divide Christians today: barriers of race, barriers of class, barriers of age, even barriers of shared interest. Friends, we can't let those barriers split us up. In the Lord's church, it doesn't matter whether somebody is white, black, brown, or purple. It doesn't matter whether we live on the wrong side of the tracks or on Easy Street. It doesn't matter whether we were born in 1935 or 1995. We are Christians first, last, and always, and that's the way we need to see one another.
- E. We also have a responsibility to **CARE FOR ONE ANOTHER**. Consider, for instance, Paul's description of Christian interaction in 1 Corinthians 12:24-25. His point is that the church is an organism just like the human body is an organism, and it is the nature of any creature to be concerned for the welfare of its component parts. Our hands don't just idly pick up axes and start chopping off our toes; in fact, the opposite is true. Our entire body will work together to protect any part of it. That should be our philosophy in the church too. We shouldn't just pay attention to our three or four friends. Instead, we should see everyone in the congregation as important, care about what happens to anyone, and do what we can to help them get to heaven.
- F. As part of this, we need to learn to **CONSIDER ONE ANOTHER**. This is what the Hebrews writer advises in Hebrews 10:24. This is certainly not a trait that comes naturally to other people, and this becomes obvious to us when we consider children. I've never yet known a three-year-old whom I would describe as considerate. Most kids live in a world that revolves around them, and too many Christians act like big little kids. They have

a me-centered conception of the assembly. They come to see what they can get out of it, and if the songleader or preacher or teacher doesn't live up to expectations, they get upset. That's backwards. We don't come together to see what we can get; we come together to see what we can give. We are here to look at one another, see the needs that they have, and fulfill those needs, not sit back and let others tend to us like an overgrown infant. The point is, friends, that we need to pay attention. We need to ask ourselves who hasn't been at services recently, who looks and sounds like they've had a hard week, who seems lonely like they need a friend, and then help people out in the way that solves their problems. That's considering.

II. Our Actions toward One Another.

- A. As we engage in this pattern of looking to one another's needs, one of the first things we need to do is to **RECEIVE ONE ANOTHER**. This shows up in Romans 15:7, just a couple verses after a passage we've looked at already today. The point here, friends, is that having the same mind toward one another ought to show up in the way we live. If every Christian is truly important to us, we ought to act like it. It always strikes me as strange, brethren, when I see a Christian whose best friends are outside of the church, not inside it. If our faith is truly the central fact of our lives, we ought to be looking to associate with people who share it. And yet, so many brethren have next to nothing to do with other Christians at all. That shouldn't be. I guarantee you, folks, that the people in this congregation are well worth spending time with. They're good people, good friends, and best of all, the more you associate with them, the likelier you are to go to heaven. Let's receive one another, then, not just with a hi and handshake after services, but by connecting our lives with theirs.
- B. Similarly, folks, in the work we do for God, we need to learn to **GIVE PREFERENCE TO ONE ANOTHER**. That's what Paul is trying to get us to do in Romans 12:10. This is not something that the world will do naturally, but we need only to look at success in the world to see how important it is. Take, for instance, two different basketball teams. One of those teams is full of talented but selfish players. Each one of them wants to be the guy who scores 30 points a game, and if they have a good shot, they'll never pass the ball to a player who has a better shot. By contrast, consider the basketball team where the players care more about wins than scoring, the team where players are willing to do little things that don't show up on the stat sheet if that's what it takes to get the victory. That's the way we need to be. The church has two main missions: making disciples of all nations and then building up those who are already disciples. As long as those missions get carried out as fully as they can be, we shouldn't much care who's doing it. It doesn't matter which Christian seems to be getting the credit, as long as the church keeps getting the win.
- C. We also need to learn to **SERVE ONE ANOTHER**. See Paul's take on this in Galatians 5:13. In context, Paul is opposing this to the idea of those who are motivated by the flesh and seek to bite and devour one another. As we see from the stories of early churches like the church in Corinth, this was a problem in the first century, and it continues to be a problem today. Sometimes, Christians just get the idea that they have to be the ones in charge, that the church leadership must listen to them, and that if other Christians don't treat them just so, then they've been horribly wronged. That's not the point, friends. As Christians, we're here for others, and that's true not just in the assembly, but everywhere. We should constantly be looking to fill the needs that our brethren have. Christ was willing to die to serve. What are we willing to do?
- D. As Christians, we also have a responsibility to **SPEAK TO ONE ANOTHER**. Consider Paul's admonition on the subject in Ephesians 5:18-19. As we've been saying repeatedly in our adult Bible class this quarter, one of the primary objects of our singing is to teach one another. The hymns we sing are supposed to build the congregation up and help all of us to do what pleases God. That means, friends, that if we choose not to sing, for whatever reason, we're letting our brethren down. There are times, friends, when a brother or a sister may need not just to hear the truth, but to hear it from us. If we sing a hymn, their relationship with us and their perception of us may be such that our teaching and admonishing gets through to them in a way that no one else's could. Besides, we should want to speak to them. We should want to encourage them to live in a godly way. We should want to tell them about the greatness of God. We should want to because we love them and want to help them. Next to our brethren's needs, friends, our desires for silence shouldn't matter.
- E. In a more general sense even than that, though, God has instructed all of us to **EDIFY ONE ANOTHER**. That's the message of 1 Thessalonians 5:11. Remember, friends, Ephesians 4 teaches that every Christian is responsible for the building up of the body of Christ. Every Christian, not just the preacher, not even just the men of the congregation. It doesn't matter whether we're a 12-year-old boy or an 80-year-old woman; we still have this duty to edify. Part of the way that we carry out this duty is through the singing we just discussed, but that's not all of it. When we consider one another, part of what we're supposed to be considering is how to stir one another up to love and good works. That means, friends, that we should know enough about the gifts and interests of the Christians around us that we can encourage them to serve God in the way that they are best equipped to do. This can be done from the pulpit, but it can just as easily be done with a quiet word or two in the back of the auditorium after services. It can be done with a card, or a brief discussion of a relevant passage over the phone. We should look for ways to make other Christians more Christlike.

Conclusion. If you want this kind of relationship with God's people, repent and come to Him today.