

Body Building
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We are in a sermon series called Stronger Together. I prayed this week about what we can do as believers to strengthen each other and build each other up. We've taught how we are the body of Christ and each one of us is a part of that body. Romans 12:4-5 says:

For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.

What does "we are members of one another" mean? The NIV says *each member belongs to all the others*. The Amplified Version says *We are parts one of another (mutually dependent on one another)*. This passage goes on to say that because of this, we all need to use our gifts and talents to build up the body of Christ. We see this again in Ephesians 4:15-16.

Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

God's Word Translation says:

As each and every part does its job, He makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

As I studied all of this I felt led to preach a message called Body Building. I'm not talking about building your physical body, although that is important. I'm talking about building up the body of Christ in love.

I started thinking about the different ways we are strengthened. First and foremost – God strengthens us. 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 says:

May our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who loved us and by His grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

But we also need to strengthen ourselves in the Lord! David had to do that when an enemy burned down his city and stole everything including all the families. Even David's men turned on him, but 1 Samuel 30:6 says:

But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God.

David then went after the enemy and got everything back!

So God strengthens us, we strengthen ourselves in the Lord, but God also uses other people to strengthen us. 1 Thessalonians 3:2 says:

We sent Timothy, who is our brother and God's fellow worker in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith.

I saw from this that we all have a role in building the body of Christ. So, I sought the Lord on how to preach that and felt led to preach on how we strengthen one another by doing the one-another commands of the Bible. So, I did a study of every time the phrase “one another” was used in the New Testament.

“One another” is two words in English, but it’s only one word in Greek: ἀλλήλων (*ah-LAY-loan*). It’s a reciprocal pronoun which means that it speaks of actions that are mutual, given by each toward the other. Of course – there are times it seems one is doing all or most of the giving, but the goal is mutual giving and receiving. Remember what Romans 12:5 says:

We are parts one of another (mutually dependent on one another).

The phrase “one-another” is found 100 times in 94 New Testament verses. 47 of those verses give instructions to the church, and 60% of those instructions come from Paul. When you look at these verses, a few common themes show up:

One-third of the one-another commands deal with the unity of the church.
One third of them instruct Christians to love one another.
About 15% stress an attitude of humility among believers.

Here’s the thing you must understand: You cannot obey the one-another commands without other people. In fact, there are many biblical commands you cannot obey without being part of a church and in relationship with other believers! You must be in relationship with others to do the one anothers!

You can say you love people all day long, but if you are not in relationship with others, what does that really mean? It’s meaningless. True love initiates, builds and maintains relationships.

I believe the other one-another commands are ways of expressing our love. They are ways we meet each other’s needs. They are the way we grow stronger together as we build the body of Christ.

The phrase “love one another” is mentioned 17 times in the New Testament – way more than the other one-another commands. Since most of the one-another verses show us how to love one another – I want to start with that today. I’ll preach on the others in upcoming weeks.

Jesus reduced the whole Bible down to one thing we need to know and do – LOVE - love God and love people.

We see this in Matthew 22:37-40 when Jesus said the greatest commandment is this–

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.

Jesus tells us to fulfill God's commands by loving God and loving people.

LOVE FOR GOD IS EXPRESSED THROUGH -

Putting God first in your life

Obedience - John 14:15 says: *If you love Me, keep My commandments.*

Praise and Worship

But love for God is also expressed by loving other people!

Hebrews 6:10 says:

God is not unjust; He will not forget your work and the love you have shown Him as you have helped His people and continue to help them.

That's powerful! One of the ways we show love to God is by loving and helping people. This is so important that the Bible commands us many times to love one another! Jesus said in 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, Jesus commands us to love one another. Why is this a new commandment? After all, the Old Testament commanded people to love each other. What makes it new and different is that Jesus commanded us to love each other as He loves us. Wow! That's a pretty high standard! How does Christ love us?

He loved us First

He loves us Freely

He loves us Fully

And He loves us Forever!

Think about how Jesus expressed love by:

Giving-

Forgiving

Serving- washed disciples' feet (John 13:1-17)

Accepting people where they are

Selflessly

Sacrificially

Intentionally – love is a choice

Jesus loved sinners
 Jesus loved His enemies (Luke 6:27)
 Jesus loved by paying attention to those others ignored
 Jesus loved by touching the untouchable.
 He laid down His life in every way – so must we.

And Jesus tells us the result of us loving each other this way – everyone will know we are disciples of Christ.

They won't know it by the things we say or the rules we have.

They won't know it by the way we look or dress.

They will know it when we love each other as Christ loves us.

The first and most important thing you must develop is love for God and love for people.

You will not get along with people if you don't love people.

You will not build relationships if you don't love people.

You will not be a good leader if you don't love people.

You will not make a lasting impact if you don't love people.

They know if you really care about them or not.

I've seen this truth in my life. Testimony – degree in theology – trained in Bible – nouthetic counseling – Word-based counseling. Basically it asks, "What does the Bible say about your problem?" Then it says, "Now do it."

I became very legalistic with people. I thought all I had to do was quote a Scripture and they would be instantly changed. I would leave them battered, bruised, and bleeding having beat them up with the Bible.

I started noticing I was not helping most people. I had not yet learned that people do not really care how much you know until they know how much you care. The frustrating thing for me was that Deb and I would do a lot of counseling together. I would quote Scripture and tell people what they needed to do. Deb would sit back, pray, and discern the real issue.

Then she would express God's love for them and speak a word that would pierce their heart... and people would experience breakthroughs. I sat there in awe thinking – Why can't I do that?

One of my problems was that I came across right but uncaring. I had not yet learned that you can be totally right on one level, but totally wrong on another level.

I tended to be right on the head level. I have a degree in theology and I've spent my life studying the Bible. People would even agree that I was right in what I said. But I was not touching them on the heart level. I had to learn that you don't always have to be right. You don't have to win every war.

This is a paradox, but to succeed in life and ministry, you must care about others more than you care about yourself. Philippians 2:3-4 says:

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Is it wrong to ever think of our self? Of course not. But we all can learn from others. You don't have to have all the answers. You don't have to win at everything. Life is not a competitive sport.

If you want to get ahead, put others ahead of you.
If you want to succeed, make others a success.
If you want to win, help others win.

We can only do that if we follow the advice in 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.

We must love each other deeply, from the heart.

By the way – let me say that you do not have to like everyone – but you do have to love everyone. Remember – God's kind of love is more than a feeling. It involves deliberate choice and sacrificial action.

Agape love is God's kind of love and is giving, selfless and unconditional. Love is deliberating choosing what is best for the other person, even if it means self-sacrifice. In other words, true love can only be known by the actions it prompts. I John 3:11; 16-18 says:

This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another.... This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

Love is a choice and love is an action. We know God loves because He did something – He gave His Son. It is not I'll love you if, or I'll love you because but, I'll love you period.

In other words – God's love is "in spite of" not "because of."
God loves us in spite of who we are, not because of who we are.
God loves us in spite of what we do, not because of what we do.

Most of us do not have much experience with unconditional love.
Most of what we call love is conditional.

We tend to give love if we receive love and withhold love if our needs are not met. But, agape love is much more radical than that. It is doing what is best for the other person whether they deserve it or not.

Love gives and love meets needs! This is the kind of love that Jesus has and that God commands us to have! And since love is a command, then we can choose to obey or disobey – to love or not love. That means love is a choice. To understand that, we need to understand true love. This kind of love is described 1 Corinthians 13:4-13

Love is patient, love is kind. Love does not envy, does not boast, love is not arrogant. Love does not behave rudely, does not insist on its own way, is not easily provoked, thinks no evil. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things... And now abide faith, hope and love, these three, but the greatest of these is love.

God actually commands us to love this way! This is not a command to have loving feelings toward other people – it is a command to do what Jesus did and meet their needs. Love involves dying to self and giving something up – giving yourself up – for those you love. For example, Ephesians 5:25 says:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her.

I heard about a man who went to his pastor to tell him he wanted to divorce his wife. The pastor asked him why and the man answered, “I don’t love her anymore.” The pastor said, “Don’t you know the Bible commands husbands to love their wives?” The man answered, “I just don’t feel close to her like a wife.”

The pastor responded, “Oh, she’s more like a sister?” The man said, “Yes Pastor, she’s more like a sister than a wife.” The pastor responded, “You know, the Bible commands us to love our families, so if you can’t love her like a wife, love her like a sister.”

To which the man responded, “Well, she’s not really close as a sister.” So the pastor said, “Oh she’s more like a neighbor, not family?” The man said, “Yes Pastor, she’s more like a neighbor than a sister.”

So, the pastor said, “You know, the Bible commands us to love our neighbors.” So, the man said, “Actually, now that I think about it, she’s not really like a neighbor. We don’t get along; we fight all the time.”

So, the pastor said, “Oh, so she’s more like an enemy?” The man’s face lit up and he said, “Exactly! That’s it. She’s more like an enemy.” And the pastor responded, “You do know that the Bible commands us to love our enemies.”

Needless to say, this man did not get any easy out from his pastor on his lack of love.

That's because if God commands us to love – then He will provide the ability to love – in fact, He will love through us.

Loving like Jesus loves means dying to self to meet other people's needs.
I know it's nearly impossible to love some people.
That's why Romans 5:5 says:

The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

That's why we need to be filled with the Spirit! How can we be Spirit-filled and yet not Love-filled? To me they're the very same thing!

Jesus gave the world His best and they killed Him - yet He loved them anyway.
God is calling us to do the same and He gives us the power of the Spirit to enable us to obey the new commandment to love as He loves.

You see, Jesus did not say, "Love people when they're loveable. Love them when you feel like it. Love them when it's convenient. Love them as long as they are meeting your needs."

NO! Jesus allows no excuses. He says, "Whatever they do to you, you love them anyway!" That's the radical way He loved.

Think of the day He was crucified. He was beaten, mocked, a crown of thorns was pressed into His head and He was nailed to a cross. He did nothing to deserve any of this.

He chose to love those who crucified Him anyway. He chose to forgive them anyway. That's the radical way Jesus loves. He loves anyway.

Aren't you glad He loves you anyway - In spite of yourself?
We have all sinned, but Jesus loves us anyway!
We have all failed, but Jesus loves us anyway!
We have all made mistakes, but Jesus loves us anyway!
We all are less than perfect, but Jesus loves us anyway!
We are all unlovable at times, but Jesus loves us anyway!
This is how we are loved by God and this is how He wants us to love others.

I'm telling you right now, none of us can do this in our own strength.
We all fall short in loving others, but we can no longer excuse it.

We need to cry out to God to change our hearts and ask for God to love the unlovable through us and forgive the unforgivable through us!

Then and only then will we be able to build up the body of Christ!