

Having taken a short break from the gospel of John, we've been engaged in a short topical series entitled, Pressing Questions—thus far we've consider such questions as, Are you a true Christian, Are you a growing Christian, Are you a loving husband, Are you a submissive wife, Is your marriage God-honoring, and Are you an obedient child...

Now—I originally intended to add a few additional questions with regards to the home, but I've decided instead to finish this series today with two final questions—Are you loving the brethren (this morning), and Are you a true worshiper (this evening)...

Thus—with these two questions, we enter into the realm of churchmanship, a subject that has fallen on very hard times—I trust most of us agree, that generally speaking, the church is no longer given its rightful place, some even view it as optional—but, the religion of the NT is inseparable from the church, and not merely an abstract view of the church, but the local church (with members, pastors, deacons, discipline, and public worship)...

Thus, before I continue, let me briefly suggest two reasons for the centrality and importance of the church—
[1] you cannot sever the Head from the body—dear brethren, simply put, no one can have Christ as Head who rejects His body—these two are inseparable—what a person thinks of the local church, they think of Christ, and no more...

[2] You cannot sever the individual members from the body—the NT describes the church as a body, with each individual member playing an important and necessary part—my friends, I don't need to be unnecessarily graphic, but the same is true in the natural—if you were to remove a hand or foot from the body, it would not survive—so too, our Savior has so joined us together, that our spiritual health, is necessarily tied together as members of the same body...

Now—before we come to our topic let me remind you of the distinction between the universal and local church—the universal church is comprised of every saved person in heaven (victorious) and on earth (militant), this is glorious and important truth—there is a sense in which, every true Christian on earth comprises a single and universal church...

But then there is the local church, and this is usually what is meant in the NT when it makes reference to the church—this is a local body of believers, governed by what the NT specifically teaches about the church—there's a definable membership, officers, and ordinances—thus, it's the local church that's meant, when I speak about churchmanship...

It isn't that difficult to think of the "one another" passages (love, forgive, encourage, comfort, and forbear with one another), when we think in abstract terms—but when we think of these duties in light of specific individual people, that's when things become difficult, but brethren, it's in the local church that these things become a necessity...

One last thing—in 1672 Joseph Caryl (an English Independent minister) died, and his church was combined with another Independent church, pastored by John Owen, and on the first Lord's Day after these churches combined, Owen preached a sermon entitled Gospel Charity (love) from Col.3:14, "But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection"—it is a classic sermon on brotherly love, and I'm going to quote much from it...

- I. The Pattern For Love—v34
- II. The Promotion of Love
- III. The Motivation to Love—v35

I. The Pattern for Love—v34

- 1. Simply put—our Savior commands us to love each other, in the same way He loved the disciples throughout the 3 yrs, and esp on the cross...

2. V34—"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another..."
3. The commandment to love one another is an old commandment, for it's found throughout the OT Scriptures...
4. Lev.19:18—"You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD..."
5. He calls it a "new commandment" because, He's added to it, His own perfect example for us to imitate and follow...
6. 1Jn.2:7-8—"Brethren, I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you heard from the beginning. Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining..."
7. The "old commandment" is that we love one another, this was taught from the beginning (throughout the OT)...
8. The "new commandment," is that we love others in the way Christ loved us, that is, following His example...
9. V6—"He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked"—love others as Christ loved us...
10. The phrase "the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining" is a comparison of the two covenants...
11. The OC with its "dimmer" revelation was giving way to the NC with its "brighter" and superior revelation...
12. Thus—by a "new commandment" our Savior means—the old commandment perfectly illustrated by Him in His life and esp death...
13. This of course underscores that Christ is God, for who alone can give us a new commandment, but the King of kings...
14. Christ took the old commandment, fulfilled it, and gives us a new commandment (love others as I have loved you)...
15. Jn.15:12—"This is My commandment (this is His new commandment), that you love one another as I have loved you (for these past 3 yrs esp on the cross)..."
16. Now—before I suggest 5 descriptions of Christ's love for us (and thus our love for others), let be briefly define it...
17. John Owen—"What is this love? I answer briefly, it is a fruit of the Spirit of God, an effect of faith, whereby believers, being knit together by the strongest bonds of affection, upon the account of their interest in one head, Jesus Christ, and participating of one Spirit, do delight in, value, and esteem each other, and are in a constant readiness for all those regular duties whereby the temporal, spiritual, and eternal good of one another may be promoted..."
18. Simply put—Christian or brotherly love is—the fruit of God's Spirit, whereby Christians delight in one another, highly value each other, and thus seek each others physical and spiritual good...
19. Jonathan Edwards—"The main thing in Christian love is a spirit to delight in and seek the good of those who are the objects of that love..."
20. There are basically two aspects to brotherly love—there is a love of delight (complacency) and a love of doing (benevolence)...
21. And these two aspects or dimensions of brotherly love, are also true of Christ's love for His beloved people...
22. [a] Love of delight (complacency), Ps.16:3—"As for the saints who are on the earth, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight..."
23. [b] Love of doing (benevolence)—because Christ loved His people with a love of delight, He loved them with a love of doing...
24. Now—here I want to suggest a fivefold description of Christ's love for us, that serves as the pattern for brotherly love...
25. I want to suggest, that Christ's love for His people is—selfless, tangible, sincere, undeserved and enduring...

26. [1] Selfless—Christ loved His people selflessly—that is—His love wasn't concerned about Himself but others...
27. And dear brethren, this is at the very heart of what love is—love is concerned with others and not with self...
28. The greatest display of love was Christ dying for His people—Christ laying down His life for the good of others...
29. Matt.20:27-28—"And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many..."
30. Christ did not come into this world to be served but to serve—He came not for His own good, but for others...
31. And brethren, this is a lesson difficult to learn—the church does NOT exist for you, but you exist for others...
32. Unfortunately, about 30 years ago, there arose a philosophy that portrays the church as existing to meet all of our supposed needs...
33. Thus—people no longer came to church, with the focus on Christ and others, but instead, focus was placed on oneself...
34. This of course was in response to our selfish and self-focused age, where people are consumed with self-satisfaction...
35. Accordingly, the fundamental purpose of the church was shifted from Christ and others, to, How can the church satisfy YOU..
36. But my dear friend, may I say something that may offend you—the church does not exist for you or for me...
37. The church first exists for Christ and then others—the focus of the church is to be on Christ and then on others..
38. Now—this is reflected in the law of God—"Love God with al your heart, and your neighbor as you love yourself..."
39. Now—remember these are the two great commandments (not three)—we must first love God and then others...
40. This is the purpose of the church—to serve as a place where Christians fulfill the law of God—love God and neighbor...
41. Perhaps I can put it like this—Christ's love was focused on others not himself, He was concerned with God and others...
42. [2] Tangible—Christ loves His church in word and deed—He both tells and He shows His love for His people...
43. [a] Christ loves us with words—He tells us about His love in Scripture, and He makes us hear it by His Spirit...
44. Oh brethren, surely Christ tells us about His love—there is a sense in which every page tells us about His love...
45. So too, it's in every way right and necessary, for us to tell each other, verbally and literally, that we love one another...
46. This can be illustrated in marriage—Isn't it necessary, for husbands and wives to verbally affirm their love...
47. Almost every time my wife says goodbye (when we are speaking on the phone), she tells me that she loves me...
48. And do you know what, over the years I have come to expect it, and when she doesn't say it, it seems strange...
49. The same thing happens when I say goodbye to my mother, almost every time we verbally affirm our mutual love...
50. Brethren, let me put it as plainly as I can—we as Christians need to verbally affirm our love one to another...
51. There are at times, when I am speaking to a Christian brother on the phone, that I may end by saying—I love you...
52. And it's interesting to hear the response—at times, they don't say anything but stutter, because they're not used to it...

53. But brethren, if Christ verbally tells us about His love for us, then we must verbally tell each other about our love for them...
54. [b] Christ loves us with deeds—that is, He went beyond mere words, He showed us His love through deeds...
55. There is a sense in which, everything Christ did, was an act of love for His people, throughout His life and death...
56. His incarnation, sufferings, resurrection, ascension, and intercession, all show or manifest Christ's love for His people...
57. So too, Christian love must go beyond words, but must also express itself in tangible and concrete acts or deeds...
58. 1Jn.3:18—"Let us not love in word or in tongue (merely), but in deed and in truth"—in actions and truthfulness...
59. [3] Sincere—that is, the Savior loved and loves His people from the heart, with a genuine and truthful love...
60. It isn't merely in word and deed, it isn't merely external, it isn't merely for show—but it's sincere and honest...
61. Thus—here I'm largely thinking of motivation—why do we do the things we do, why do we love the brethren...
62. Well—let me ask you—why did Christ love His people—what was the motivations that drove Him to love...
63. [a] The good of others—our Savior's love was sincere—it was genuine, it was birthed from proper motives...
64. [b] The glory of God—all that our Savior did, was not only for the good of His people, for also for His Father's glory...
65. So too—Christian love is sincere in that, it acts for proper reasons and is driven by proper motives—it's genuine...
66. It doesn't act merely or purely for the praise of men, but ultimately, it seeks the good of others, unto God's glory...
67. Rom.12:9—"Let love be without hypocrisy" 1Jn.3:18—"Let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth (truthfulness)..."
68. 1Pet.1:22—"Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart..."
69. [4] Underserved—that is, Christ's love for His people was not based any supposed merit or good in its object...
70. Brethren, this is essential to grasp—Christ did not love His people because they are lovely or worthy of love...
71. He loved them while unlovely, He loved them though unworthy—Christ loved His people while they were enemies...
72. So too, Christians are to love one another even though at times they may not be all that lovely or worthy of love...
73. [5] Enduring—by this I mean, Christ's love for His people was persistent, it was fervent, it was never-ending..."
74. Again, brethren, it's rather easy to love people for a short while, putting up with them for a few months or years...
75. But the difficulty comes when you live along-side someone for decades, loving them through the thick and thin...
76. But—I ask you, did our Savior's love end, did He love them only for a season, and then allow His love to decline...
77. No—He loved them at the beginning, through the middle, and at the end—His love for them never weakened...
78. Jn.13:1—"Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus know that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end..."

II. The Promotion of Love

1. Though our Savior here provides no helps, I want to suggest four practical helps for promoting brotherly love...
2. [1] View others through the eyes of Christ—that is, view them as the eternal objects of Christ's dying love...
3. Though from our perspective saints are very slow, weak, common, and despised, they are eternally loved by Christ...
4. View each member of the church as the object of Christ's electing, justifying, sacrificing, and glorifying love...
5. John Owen—"If we find a person that is orderly admitted into church society, he is as certain and evident an object of our love, as if we saw him laying in the arms of Christ..."
6. John Angell James—"These, should a believer exclaim, as he looks on the church, 'are the objects of the Redeemer's living and dying love, whom he regards with complacency; and out of affection to him, I feel an inexpressible delight in them. I love to associate with them, to talk with them, to look upon the, because they are Christ's'..."
7. [2] Labor to know every member in the church—just as Christ knows the sheep individually, so we must love each individual member...
8. Philemon 1:5—"I thank God...hearing of your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints..."
9. This is one of the unique properties of Christian love—it transcends the temporal things that ordinarily adorn people to us...
10. Why do siblings love one another, but because they share parents—there are common things that unite them...
11. Why do most Americans find it easy to love other Americans, but because we come from the same country...
12. Well, dear brethren, why do Christians love other Christians, but because we are one family and headed to the same country...
13. The world unites around temporal and physical things, but Christians unite around heavenly and spiritual things...
14. Regardless of background, regardless of skin-color, regardless of personal experiences, regardless of social statutes...
15. Now, brethren, obviously I am fully aware that, for various reasons, we will gravitate to certain people in the church...
16. And I'm not necessarily saying that's bad, that's inevitable and understandable, there are things that especially unite us...
17. But—what I am saying is this—the thing that should unite us more deeply than those, is that we are in Christ...
18. And thus, there must be a general and broad love that is extended to all the members, without a single exception...
19. John Owen—"Let none, then, pretend that they love the brethren in general, and love the people of God, and love the saints, while their love is not fervently exercised towards those who are in the same church society with them. Christ has given it you for a trial: he will try your love at the last day by your deportment in that church wherein you are..."
20. [3] Mortify all that hinders love especially self-love—above all else, our enemies seek to put out this flame of love...
21. I suggest, of all the sins that hinder love, self-love is first on the list, it is the great hindrance to brotherly love...
22. A.W. Pink—"The root hindrance to the exercise of brotherly love is *self-love* – to be so occupied with number one that the interests of others are lost sight of..."
23. John Owen—"The causes of the decay of love, whence it does not continue as it ought, are, 1. Self-love (he then gives 4 others)..."
24. John Calvin—"Self love keeps all our senses bound in such a manner that brotherly love is altogether banished..."

25. Self-love hinders brotherly love—it takes to itself, all the concern and energy that should be focused on others...
26. Nathaniel Vincent—"Self-love will make you unconcerned for the honor of God or for the good of man; it will produce a carelessness in you of others' welfare and hinder you from truly minding your own. He who loves nobody but himself, and matters not what harms befall others, is a pest of the world, unfit for Christian or human society..."
27. [4] Drink deeply and frequently from Christ's love for you—the more we taste His love, the more loving we'll be...
28. 1Jn.4:19—"We love Him because He first loved us"—that is, we love God because we have come to know His love for us...
29. Love is contagious—only after the knowledge of His love is poured out into our hearts, do we then love Him and others...
30. My dear friend, this is absolutely essential to grow in our love for God and others, drink deeply of His love for us...
31. And how do you do this—well surely brethren, you must stay in His word, which speaks of and shows us His love...

III. The Motivation to Love—v35

1. Here I want to suggest three rather obvious motives for Christians, to love one another, as Christ has loved them...
2. [1] Love imitates Christ—that is, love allows us to imitate Christ, to walk as He walked and talk as He talked...
3. Jn.13:35—"By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another"—that is, because love characterized Me, it characterizes My disciples...
4. Christians are followers of Christ—we are follow His teaching and example—true Christians look like Christ...
5. John Angell James—"Jesus Christ was an incarnation of love in our world. He was love living, breathing, speaking, acting, amongst men. His birth was the nativity of love, his sermons the words of love, his miracles the wonders of love, his tears the meltings of love, his crucifixion the agonies of love, his resurrection the triumph of love. Hence it was natural, that love should be the cardinal virtue in the character of his saints, and that it should be the law which regulates their conduct towards each other..."
6. Now—brethren, let me clarify, this in no way lessens the need for personal holiness or doctrinal exactness...
7. For, if you think about it, these two things show itself, love is the essence of holiness and result of doctrinal exactness...
8. If a person isn't loving they are FAR from holy, and if they are not loving, who cares how much doctrine they know...
9. My friends, I really wonder at times do we really get this—love, TRUE Christian love, is what truly matters...
10. If I were to ask you, what one character trait would identify you, more than any other, as a follow of Christ, what it be...
11. Well my friends listen carefully to the words of our Savior—"By THIS all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another..."
12. Now, I am well aware that the world, and even many within the church, define love differently than the Scriptures...
13. Most people in the world, define love as, allowing people to act any way they want, without confronting them...
14. Well, certainly brethren, this is not love but hate, for—"love does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth..."
15. But—real love, that's selfless, tangible, sincere, undeserved, and enduring, this should characterize God's people...
16. [2] Love glorifies Christ—love glorifies Him, because it's the result of His redeeming love, worked in our hearts...

17. My dear friends, true Christian love is a precious flower, that does not grow in the soil of our native hearts...
18. Love is the result of God's grace, it's the fruit of His Spirit within us, and thus, He and He alone gets the glory...
19. This is not only true in the church but in the world—as others around us behold how we truly love one another...
20. CHS—"No sermon can be so eloquent to the world as a true manifestation of the love of Christ; and when God restores to his Church genuine, hearty, and sincere Christian love...then shall the world be more impressed by the gospel than it is at present..."
21. Now—surely brethren Spurgeon didn't believe that our love to one another could somehow save their souls...
22. Nothing can save the souls of sinners except the gospel of Christ, but this gospel isn't to come in a vacuum...
23. Jn.17:20-21—"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me..."
24. [3] Love is rewarded by Christ—on the last day, Christ rewards people, based on how they've treated His people...
25. Because Christ eternally loves His people, He takes careful notice of every loving act, done on their behalf...