

# Foundations: Essentials for One Anothering

Pastor Tim Rech, Clearcreek Chapel

## Introduction

One anothering is a significant theme in the Bible. In fact, there are over thirty “one anothers” given in the New Testament. These are the activities of the believer and are the expressions of life and love that hold a church together.

We will be devoting a series to these various one anothers throughout the month. However, before we begin to study and apply them, some time and consideration is needed of some foundational character qualities in our walk with Christ.

For “one anothering” depends on some Spirit filled attitudes in our lives and in our walk with Christ. Without them, we cannot “one another” one another. The Scriptures have much to say about these building blocks and we will look at four of them together this evening; attitudes of humility, accepting, preferring, and submitting. These are qualities that cannot be expressed towards one another well until they are sufficiently part of our character.

They are familiar things to us but it is my hope that considering them together this evening would serve to stir us up and offer us ourselves a test on how we are progressing in them.

## Humility

The first we will consider is humility. Humility with love is so vital in our walk with the Lord and in living with and serving one another.

In Ephesians four, Paul is writing to God’s people in Ephesus and in the first three chapters, he recounts the spiritual blessings from God that he and they enjoy in Christ, recalls their pre-Christ condition, reminds them of the basis by which they were saved (by grace through faith), tells them of what God is doing across the world bringing Jew and Gentile together into one body in Christ, tells them of his God given apostolic ministry to preach the gospel to the Gentiles and thereby show the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places the perfect wisdom of God as expressed through the building of His church.

Paul prays for them that they may have spiritual eyes to see all that God is doing and to have the strength through the Spirit of God that Christ would dwell in their hearts by faith. Then having stated these glorious truths, he then brings it home to us. How does biblical truth apply to our everyday life – what are the implications for our day-to-day?

Let’s read beginning in verse one:

*I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, <sup>2</sup>with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup>eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Eph 4:1-3*

He begins in 4:1 urging or begging them *“to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which they have been called.”* They have a high calling in chapters 1-3 which corresponds to who they are in Christ. And we have this high calling as well. I hope you see this today.

So what does this worthy manner of walking look like? Verses two and three tell us; *“with humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another in love, and eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”* Now we do not have time to cover all of these but let us consider humility from which the others proceed.

Webster’s defines humility as that *“the quality or state of not thinking you are better than other people.”* But the biblical definition goes much further. Stuart Scott writes, *“... a simple definition of humility is the mindset of Christ (a servant’s mindset): a focus on God and others, a pursuit of the recognition and the exaltation of God, and a desire to glorify and please God in all things and by all things He has given.”*<sup>1</sup>

Humility is considered the root of all virtue and is critical to one anothering. Without it, how can we properly relate to our brothers and sisters?

Now a word of warning before going any further; any contemplation of humility brings with it danger. For humility is described as *“that grace that, when you know you have it, you have lost it.”*<sup>2</sup> It is like the book written by one author on the subject called, *“Humility and How I Attained It.”* You see when we focus too much on our humility then it quickly vanishes, replaced by its opposite and its enemy; pride. If humility is the root of virtue, then pride is the root of every sin. No one is immune from pride - the only question is to what degree we possess it, for we naturally think about and obsess over ourselves.

God has much to say about pride. He hates it. Proverbs 16:18 says, *“Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”* And Proverbs 26:12 says, *“Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.”* And James 4:6 says, *God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”*

Pride is behind all rebellion and disobedience; there are a multitude of biblical examples and we see it all around us. But we need not leave our front door to see pride in our own lives. It raises its ugly head in so many areas of our lives; pride over our ability, achievements, position, appearance, possessions, and knowledge. And it can be at its worst in the sphere of spirituality; self righteousness, spiritual attainment and experience. And by no means is this a comprehensive list.

And pride deceives us. We notice it in others right away and are quick to speak against it, while at the same time, seeing no problem with it within ourselves and not only that, we even applaud ourselves for it. Pride blinds us to our need for God and His grace. And in our relationships, it blinds us to the needs of one another. And when we are blind we can hardly walk, much less *“one another”* one another.

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<sup>1</sup> Stuart Scott, *The Exemplary Husband* (Focus Publishing Inc, 2002), 187

<sup>2</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary, Volume 2* (Cook Communications Ministries, 2001), 35

Stuart Scott defines pride as, *“the mindset of self (a master’s mindset rather than that of a servant): a focus on self and the service of self, a pursuit of self recognition and self exaltation, and a desire to control and use all things for self.”*<sup>3</sup>

But God wants us moving and growing towards pride’s opposite – that is humility.

But how do we do so? We cannot manufacture humility or move towards it as an act of our will for that would be contrary to humility itself. No, humility is Holy Spirit produced. When not resisted by us, the Spirit enables us to take a proper view of God and of ourselves as inferior to Him and no better than one another.

For humility consists of a proper awareness of ourselves. Are we aware that all by ourselves we are unworthy? Can we see our sin? And if so, do we confess it regularly? 2 Cor. 3:5 says, *“Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God.”* We can often see ourselves as better than others (expressed or not) because our standard falls below that of God’s. Rather godly humility requires a constant awareness of Christ as our standard. Then our relationship to other people and to God falls into the correct order.

Do you hold others to a higher standard than you do yourself? Or do you hold yourself to the standard of Christ himself? If so, then the quality of humility will increasingly exhibit itself in you and your ability to one another others will grow.

Some practical steps to help us move towards and to stay humble include:

- 1) Spend regular time in the Word to maintain the correct view of God and of yourself
- 2) Study the life of Jesus
- 3) Pray to God to show you your pride and to produce humility in you
- 4) Ask yourself and others – do I come across as proud?
- 5) Spend a lot of time worshiping God (corporately and individually)
- 6) Work to put off pride especially at the level of our thoughts and motives
- 7) Practice much one-anothering

*{List drawn from Stuart Scott’s Exemplary Husband, pg 192}*

Humility expresses itself in praise of God, obedience to Him, trust placed in Him, and in prayerful reliance upon Him for everything. Humility gets lost in the glory, majesty, and supremacy of Christ. Humility expresses itself in gentleness, patience, longsuffering towards one another, and in loving actions towards one another.

Humility expressed among us at the Chapel involves seeing one another as equal before Christ and seeing our abilities and spiritual gifts as different but equally vital to the body and before the Lord. Romans 12:3 says, *“for by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself*

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<sup>3</sup> Stuart Scott, *The Exemplary Husband* (Focus Publishing Inc, 2002), 179

*more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.”*

If we are walking in humility our attitude is not that one ministry is superior to another. And among the elders, there is no particular super elder (yes, there may be those who are more experienced and knowledgeable in leading the flock but even this is simply a grace of God). Humility is vital in our body life together – a church can be destroyed or rendered ineffective if we do not allow the Spirit of God to culture it and maintain it in us.

### **Accepting**

Another Spirit developed quality which proceeds from humility and is foundational to our one-anothering is to accept or welcome one another in liberty. Now this should be easy, right? We are all believers in Christ, fellow heirs of the kingdom and its promises, all possessing equal standing before God having not earned any aspect of our salvation, and whose sin natures are equally offensive to a holy God. This is what the bible says, correct? Yes, but in practice, do we always think and act towards one another in a way consistent with who the bible declares we are?

All of us can give a different salvation story – some were saved out of lives filled with drugs, alcohol, or sexual related sin and some were simply saved out of self-righteousness and hypocrisy. And many of us may have a “church” story where we spent a number of years in a legalistic body or perhaps one too liberal, where disobedience to God’s Word was easily accepted. And some may have come from a church where the teaching was poor. And as a result, some of us may struggle with the freedom and liberty available to us in Christ – our conscience does not permit us to do so. So you can see there is a potential problem when one member thinks nothing of having a glass of wine while another is offended at just the thought. One would never dream of listening to a particular type of music while another sees nothing wrong with it.

And on top of this, we are naturally different; in personality, how we think, how we approach problems, and how we get things done. We differ in our weaknesses and strengths, our preferences, our interests, and in what we enjoy. Some have been at the Chapel for years while others are relatively new...and the list goes on.

Now we are good at making distinctions and this is a good thing (judging right vs wrong, truth vs lies). However, along the way we can also tend to categorize one another in a variety of different ways. And as a result, if not careful with our hearts, we will find ourselves moving away from or never even approaching or interacting with one another.

And these differences can flare when there is conflict or disagreement among us. When problems arise between us and it is in the heat of the moment we can be tempted to say in our hearts, “Who is he to say or why should I listen to her?”

The apostle Paul addressed this problem in his letter to the Romans.

After covering eleven chapters of glorious doctrine and over the course of teaching what it means to be a living sacrifice, Paul instructs the church in chapters 14-15 to not pass judgment on one another but to welcome one another – now their differences were far greater than ours – there were Jews and Gentiles in the church who were different in every way. He told the church to bear with those who are weak, that is, with those whose conscience would not permit them to enjoy the same degree of liberty from the former things (for example, what not to eat or drink). And it was important not to cause our brother to stumble, for all will need to give an account at the throne of God in how we work this out.

So then Paul concludes in verse 7 of chapter 15:

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

Welcoming and accepting means to see each other as God sees us in Christ; as His dear and beloved children, precious in His eyes, and for whom Christ died. It is to love and to know our brother well enough to not cause him to stumble or to not judge him for his liberty in Christ. It is forgetting the “old” in each other’s lives and embracing the “new” together.

And it is overlooking our practical differences.

We need to maintain a welcoming attitude whether it is a Christian joining the Chapel, a new believer in Christ, or someone who has been around here for years. If this is not you, then adopt such an attitude – the same attitude held by Christ who “welcomed you”. For without it, you are hindering your walk with Christ and your responsibility before God to “one another” one another in the church.

Let us look to involve additional people in ministry where possible or to help one another work out ministry ideas so that our Christ given gifts are being carried out according to the Spirit’s working. After moving here several years ago, you welcomed Stace and me and invited us to serve almost immediately and we were encouraged and grateful.

And this is important among the elders. The natural differences are apparent among the men. However, by God’s grace and strength, we labor to maintain one mind and heart in Christ. An attitude between us of acceptance and welcoming one another in our hearts, words, and actions is critical. For me and my brothers who serve in the eldership though, we must continue to work hard in this area – to love one another in this way. For in Christ’s church the stakes are high. Let us rejoice in the unity God has given the elders but pray continuously that it might be maintained.

So welcome and accept one another. Remember we are not all at the same place in our Christian maturity – some are still working through the remnants and perhaps consequences of our pre-Christian life and shedding wrong thinking from an unbiblical past. But nonetheless we are all the work of God; perfect in position but working out our “walk” and “practice” to His glory.

There is one other aspect though in welcoming and accepting one another – for the “welcomer” and the “welcomee”. And that is to build and maintain trust with one another by keeping a proper vertical relationship with the Lord. We must continually walk in the light so that our fellowship is maintained. 1 John 1:6-7 say, “If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not

*practice the truth. 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.*

There must be integrity in our relationship with Christ so that our relationships with one another have integrity as well. Pretending to walk in the light or simply walking away from one another because we are not, preempts our fellowship. Rather let us confess our sins to one another and seek forgiveness where needed so that our fellowship is uninterrupted. Once again, how can we truly “one another” one another when we are not in true fellowship.

### **Preferring**

Now we move onto another foundational attitude needed in order to “one another”; preferring others or putting others interests first.

Preferring is that heart attitude of placing others before ourselves regardless of what it costs. It should be the Christian’s default posture at all times. Now this does not mean to become a doormat for everyone else or to never tend to our own interests. It is not to always be available 24/7 in order to make friends, be popular or even make ourselves look good – remember it must be from the heart and motivated by genuine love. And it must be done according to wisdom for there are times when it is in the best interest of the other person for us to do nothing.

But Romans 12:10 tells us to “*Outdo one another in showing honor.*” Preferring is to show honor to one another and to do it constantly and excessively.

Now there is no better definition or example to observe than that of Christ. Please turn to Philippians 2.

As you recall, Paul was in prison. But rather than get discouraged, he was actually rejoicing – rejoicing because the gospel was going forward, the brothers were more bold to speak it, certain that his deliverance would come (regardless of whether the outcome was life or death for him), and that Christ would be honored in him. But he urged the Philippian believers to live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ; standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by those who opposed them. And he appeals to them on the basis of what they share in gospel partnership and says, “complete my joy” by how you live with one another.

We read in chapter two, verse two and following...

*2 complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 **Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.** Phil. 2:2-4*

Paul says to prefer one another, show concern over not only your own interests, but also to the interests of others. And this is how Christ thinks. In verses 5-7, we see Jesus, our Lord and King demonstrating such a mind. In verse five we read:

*5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Phil. 2:5-8*

Christ made a conscious decision of His will to come to earth to serve and to die giving the ultimate preference to others by dying on a cross. This was a level of “preferring” that far exceeds anything we will be asked to demonstrate. But this is consistent with His nature - this is who Christ our King is – One who serves others with divine love – the One with whom we share His Spirit. He is our basis and our example for preferring others.

Preferring begins with an attitude towards one another which results from a careful consideration of gospel truth and from an “attitude of gratitude” over what God has done for us in Christ. And in view of Christ’s cross bearing work, it seems like such a small thing for us to prefer one another, does it not?

So how might this attitude of preferring work itself out in our everyday lives? Well, in our homes we have a great opportunity to practice this with our spouses, children, parents, and friends. Our daily lives must not only be ordered by our needs unless of course, others are depending on our meeting our needs – for example fathers, there is a time to go to work rather than playing with the kids. We can build time into our busy schedules to be available to meet the needs of others and to spend enough time with others to even understand what their interests are.

In body life we can prefer one another in the small things; taking the most distant parking spot (if physically able), letting others take the better seats in the auditorium, gladly offering a helping hand in the nursery when needed, being on time, and the list is endless.

We can prefer others in our conversations. Rather than doing all the talking, we can listen to the other person more. Or if all we tend to do is listen, we can share more about ourselves. And we can upgrade the quality of our conversation. Rather than reciting only the activities of our lives, how about asking one another what the Lord is currently doing and teaching them in their lives and then sharing the same from our own life? In that way, we can share our weaknesses and our burdens which give opportunity for both to help and be helped. We can then pray for one another which can lay the groundwork for our next conversation.

Preferring one another is vital among elders and ministry leaders. There is a facility to share, a budget plan that involves give-and-take, limited time to fit ministry updates into a Sunday evening service, etc. All of this involves letting others’ interests take priority.

For the elders, preferring one another in our interactions is a must. There are many good ministry efforts to advance and it would be easy for each elder to go his own way and do his own thing. But thankfully that has not been my experience here for there is a beautiful sense of preferring one another among the men to discern and to do what the Lord would have us do – a beautiful setting aside of personal interests for the good of one another and the church. Yet once again, we must remain vigilant to preserve a “preferring” attitude.

## Submission

And this brings us to a fourth foundational characteristic of the Spirit-filled Christian necessary in one-anothering and that is submitting to one another. Let us turn to Ephesians 5:15.

*15 Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, **but be filled with the Spirit**, 19 addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, 20 giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 **submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.** Eph 5:15-21*

In chapter five, Paul charges the church to walk in purity and in 5:18 he says rather than being drunk with wine, be filled with the Spirit. Being “filled with the Spirit” does not refer to the initial, one-time receiving of the Spirit but is a command to continuously be filled. It is not something we do but rather something we allow to be done with us. We are to yield or submit moment by moment to Christ’s Word and be carried along by the Spirit much like the wind filling a ship’s sail and moving a ship forward. As a Christian, we must obey this command otherwise we cannot fulfill or obey God’s will for us. This can be a constant battle and where we struggle every day.

He goes on to explain the godly outworking produced by the filling of the Spirit. The first is perpetual worship in our hearts (“singing and making melody” there) and between one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. The next is giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And the last is relational and that is to submit to one another... “submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ” in verse 21.

Submitting to another requires us to relinquish our rights to another person. We all lead and / or submit depending on the various roles in which God places us. In verse 21, Paul gives us the general principle which is to submit to others according to the authority and order established by God. This applies to our roles within the church, our families, our marriages, our workplace, our government, etc. And Paul will go on to speak to several of these vital relationships in verses 22 through chapter six, verse 9.

Submission not only involves gladly accepting authority but also requires that authority be used to build up others and not lord it over them.

Submission involves seeking counsel from others and then heeding it when given. And the one giving counsel should always be ready to help in that person’s time of need.

Submission does not shirk away from those in authority but actively and gladly engages with them as needed. It also recognizes our own obligation to submit and not merely demand submission from others. And it recognizes that we are spiritual equals before God in every way.

And as we read in Philippians 2, submission takes its lead from Christ Himself who being equal in nature and essence to the Father nevertheless submitted to the Father.

We see submission in multiple aspects of body life; it occurs between elders and their flocks, ministry leaders and those involved in ministry teams, and between elders and the ministry leaders. And we also



see submission between the elders. Every elder submits to the elders as a whole with their ministry responsibilities and decisions and there is a mix of leading and submission. It is something we prize for it is what God requires. For as shepherds of the flock we submit to the Great Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Reflect / Respond**

- Humility – is your awe of God, your trust and obedience in Him, and your prayerful reliance upon Him growing? And is your humility increasingly being expressed in loving actions towards one another? Look to Christ who washed the disciples feet
- Accepting – do you accept others in the body as Christ has welcomed you? Look to Christ who welcomed you
- Preferring – is this your posture towards one another? Look to Christ who preferred us unto death on a cross
- Submitting – are you gladly submitting to one another in the place where God has you? Look to Christ who perfectly submitted to the Father in all things
- And are you building trust with one another by walking in the light of Christ? Look to Jesus regularly for forgiveness and cleansing
- What is your source of change in these things? Are you relying on your own strength or are you relying on the Spirit of God, yielding to and being filled by Him moment-by-moment?

One anothering is what glorifies God and what will keep the Chapel growing and vibrant and living according to the call of Christ – let us not forget the foundational attitudes they are built upon.