

We continue in our 'One Another' series that we've been in all summer. I always like to give a recap as I begin my messages to help set up where we are going. If you don't remember or are joining us for the first time, we've been looking at the 'one another' statements throughout the New Testament. It's important, at least in my mind, to remember that all these commands are summed up in Jesus's command to "love one another as has I have loved you" John 13:34.

What I have found most interesting about this series is that all these statements are, in fact, commands. Let's just start with the command to love one another. Have you ever been able to make yourself love someone? Or have you ever been able to make yourself feel differently from how you already felt? It's seemingly impossible. With this reality in mind, I want to let you off the hook before we begin. Today, as we look at a 'one another' found in scripture, you don't have to if you don't feel like obeying. I'm being serious. If this desire is not in you, don't try to force it. Sure, you could listen to what I say and do it begrudgingly, but that would be of no value to you or the people you are serving because God is after your heart. God wants you to desire to do what he commands of us in His word.

So, if you are still looking to get out of your responsibility to fulfill God's commands, here is your exit. My only ask is that you would question your desires? Why don't I want to do what God commands in scripture? Therein lies the rub, doesn't it. The question then becomes, how? How do I learn to desire to do what I'm commanded in scripture? I would say, "Now we are asking the right question." We discussed this way back at the beginning of summer. The only way to succeed is by "beholding Christ." By observing his life and allowing the love of Christ to fill our hearts slowly but surely, we are made more and more like him. Or as scripture says, "And we all, with unveiled faces, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit." 2 Corinthians 3:18.

So now, with that out of the way, let's look at the verses we will be studying today and see what it is that our Father expects of us with the full belief that through the Spirit's power, this is something we will see accomplished within our lives and our church. Let's stand together as we read 1 Peter 4:7-11

"7 The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. 8 Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. 9 Show Hospitality to one another without grumbling. 10 As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: 11 whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."

Several other statements are found in these verses, but I will look at verse 9. We are commanded to be "hospitable to one another without grumbling." Let me begin by saying that many of you in our church are incredible at this. Who open your homes and share your life with

others, and I want to commend you as it is obvious this desire has been placed in your hearts by your Heavenly Father.

Before examining this command more closely, consider what Peter says at the beginning of verse 7. We can't skip over the fact that Peter begins this section by saying, "The end of all things is at hand..." How are we going to blow past that and not acknowledge it? Is Peter a doomsday prepper? Is he a post-apocalyptic mad max character? Not at all. In fact, quite the opposite. This is important for us to understand. Especially given all the self-proclaimed prophets on Facebook and YouTube who are constantly churning out click bait and causing people to live in constant fear.

When Peter says that the "end of all things is at hand," he clearly isn't speaking chronologically. If he was, then why have 2,000 years passed since his writing? Peter is speaking theologically. We believe in the imminency of Christ's return, where we will receive our eternal inheritance, and it is suitable for us to look forward to that day. Peter is referring to the fact that we are in the final chapter of God's plan for creation, and when this chapter is complete, Jesus will return and establish his rule and reign. From a historical perspective, we are living in the "end times." Don't let that freak you out. To help us, Peter gives us instructions on how we should live, considering the time we are in. He gives us 5 instructions to do this, and the first two are very similar.

He begins by saying we should be "self-controlled and sober-minded." Essentially, he is saying that we need to keep our wits about us, be levelheaded, and think with a clear mind. What does that mean exactly? It means that we don't get caught up in the things of this world. If we are living in the "last days," and we are, we should realize, like Paul says, "the present form of this world is passing away." 1 Corinthians 7:31 should inform how we relate to the world around us. Not running around and screaming in the streets to "repent for the end draws near!" Rather, it changes how we raise our families, work, interact with our neighbors, and function with our communities. When we are sobered by this reality, it causes us to be clear about who we are and what we are here to do, and we align our priorities to reflect that reality.

Additionally, it informs how we pray. Peter says, "For the sake of your prayers." We are self-controlled and sober-minded to pray rightly.

Next, Peter says, "Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins." What is earnest love? It is defined as active love. We need to love one another actively and consistently. We can't allow our love for one another to fade or to grow cold. Closely related to loving one another is the idea that we need to be willing to forgive one another. If you ever loved anyone, you know there are times in your relationship when they will say or do something to hurt you. If you genuinely love that individual, your love for them will overcome the hurt. I love what Karen Jobes says, "The love that covers a multitude of sins is probably best understood as a forbearance that does not let wrongs done within the Christian community come to their fullest and most virulent expression." That is to say, if we truly have the love of

Christ in us, we won't allow a root of bitterness by which many are defiled to grow and cause destruction to our relationships or the community of faith we attend.

Finally, we come to the 'one another' statement we are focused on today, but we need the rest of the context to fulfill the command in verse 9. We are to be hospitable to one another without complaining. In the very next verse, Peter begins talking about gifts. Interestingly Hospitality is always mentioned near the list of gifts given to the church but is never mentioned as a gift. This means that Hospitality is something we should all practice and grow in. When we look at what it means to be hospitable, we find that the definition is to 'love strangers.'

I want to be very specific. According to Galatians 6:10, "As we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, especially those of the household of faith." Similarly, we are to be hospitable to everyone, but as it relates to this passage, we are to be hospitable to one another. At the time of Peter's writing, Hospitality was critical to the spread of the gospel. As teachers/apostles/missionaries made their way from town to town, they relied on the Hospitality of fellow believers to house them. Consider Paul during his missionary journeys, how hospitable the church was, and how critical they were to completing his mission. Paul would've been a stranger to many of these churches, but because of their common bond through Christ, it would've united them.

Oddly enough, the same is true for us as well. There is no way this group would've ever come together without our common bond in Christ. Consequently, some of your best friends and most meaningful relationships have come because of being a part of this community, or at least I should hope so. If not, then we need to do something better. That's where I would like to lean in. Just as the mission depended on the Hospitality of the early believer, so the mission depends on you. I can't tell you how many Sundays I leave church wishing I could've made it around the room to say hi to everyone and meet every new person who walked in the door, but as you know, it's impossible. That's where you come in. If the mission that God has called us to is the same mission that God called the early church too, then the mission's success will only be possible if the individual members of the church do their part. Hospitality is the vehicle by which the gifts of the body are deployed. One commentator said, "Hospitality is a gift to be cultivated in every Christian home. Without the grace of Hospitality, the church's expansion would be severely limited." Remember the words of Christ when he said, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me." Mathew 25:40.

Now there can be obstacles to your ability to be hospitable. Perhaps you need a home. There are more ways to be hospitable than sharing your possessions. You can also be generous with your time and with your words. Additionally, we need to exercise wisdom and caution when being hospitable, which is why we need to rely not on our own strength but on God's strength. It would be easy for us to get burned and consider that we won't make that mistake again; however, if we neglect to be hospitable to others, we rob God of the glory he could receive through us. Once again, consider that the ability to be hospitable comes from a God-given desire to do what he commands. If you find yourself grumbling and complaining, just wishing

you could cancel, chances are you are serving in your own strength and not the strength God supplies us to obey his commands.

Lastly, Peter talks about how we are stewards of God's varied grace and how we can use our gifts to serve. He is saying that we are all managers of God's household, and he has given us a variety of ways that we can individually contribute. Peter breaks it down into two categories: speaking and serving gifts. Those given speaking gifts use their gift to motivate those with serving gifts to manage their gift for the benefit of the body and the furthering of God's Kingdom.

Again, with an understanding of the times we are living in, we should direct the aim of our gifts and efforts toward Kingdom initiatives. I'll admit this takes a bit of discernment and help from others, but ultimately you know why you do what you do. It's as simple as auditing your resources to determine whether I am using them for myself, God, or not at all. Realizing that we will all be accountable for what we did with what we were given no matter how much or how little should be sobering. Your motivation should be different.

I don't want you to get the impression that somehow by doing this, you are missing out or being robbed of life. Being a Christian is a sacrifice, but it is also an invitation to really live. To be a part of something bigger than just yourself. It's an opportunity to be a part of something lasting and eternal. So maybe you'll never get the high-paying job that you hoped for, perhaps you'll never realize the American Dream and become a self-made individual, maybe you'll never get everything you ever wanted, but if you let go of those dreams and trade them for the Kingdom, you will find something much deeper. You will be richer than you could've ever hoped to be. I dare you to be more willing to open your life and share what you have and see if God doesn't end up providing you with something you always hoped for, a loving and hospitable community hospitable that the world could only dream of.

I want to break this down so that it is practical for you. There are several ways you can do this right now...

- Invite someone today out for lunch after service.
- Plan a night to have someone over your home.
- Bring coffee to someone this week. Don't stay long...
- Be willing to help and be willing to ask for help.
- Sign up for a community group.
- Sign up for the Mystery Meet Dinner
- Show up tomorrow at our baptism service to celebrate with those being baptized.

These are just a few ways we can become more hospitable as a community and remember if you begin to feel the grumbling or complaining start to creep in, you are likely doing it in your own strength and not the power God provides. You will not succeed if you try to do it alone, yet God commands us to do so. Let's together behold the glory of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, so we can become a more hospitable community, and let's ask him today to make us more like him. Amen.